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OR, Yank Yellowbird's Great 'Diskivery.'

BY WM. H. MANNING,
AUTHOR OF "WILD WEST WALT," "BORDER
BULLET," "CENTRAL PACIFIC PAUL," "THE
DUKE OF DAKOTA," "KANSAS KITTEN,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN APPEAL FOR HELP.

STARVATION CITY was a young town, and it was singularly destitute of the necessities of life even for a place in the rocky wilds of Montana. Gold was there in an encouraging quantity, and the pick of the miner was turning the soil in every adjacent gulch, but many other desirable articles were missing.

On a certain June day one thing was sorely, desperately needed, and was not to be had—a doctor.

Death was knocking at the portals of Starva-

"THOSE SCOUNDRELS," TERSELY REPLIED PARADISE SAM, TO YANK'S QUESTION,
"SAY THAT WE MUST LEAVE CAMP!"

known as "Nevermiss," a name given with the usual aptness of the red-men because his aim was so deadly and his efforts in battle so successful. They had hated him, yet he had never done harm to one of their race without sore provocation. For some years he had had no trouble with them, but if they forced a quarrel upon him, they would find he was the same Nevermiss—his fifty-five years had not lessened his strength, agility, or endurance. Indeed, as scarcely a gray hair was visible among his flaxen locks, it might almost seem that time had stood still with him.

Such was the bronzed mountaineer who, going on his wandering, aimless journey with only his grim dog for a companion, had stopped for a while at Starvation City.

Mollie Dixon looked at him with interest, well aware that her gaze was even more earnestly returned, but she suddenly aroused.

"We are forgetting the sick woman," she exclaimed.

"So we be, so we be. Yes, by hurley! I had forgot all about her. You say you want help. Wal, hyar I be with Moses, an' we're ready ter do our best for you. Ef atrocious insex are cuttin' up mean shines, jest p'int out the diffikilty, an' Moses an' I will go for 'em like the mischief."

"I don't know what to do."

"How so?"

"I am not sure of what I suspect."

"Ef I understood rightly what you said ter that unfeelin' miner, you think the other parties hev evil designs ag'in' the sick girl?"

"That is it, exactly."

"Can't you get partic'lars an' proof from her?"

"No. She is a beautiful, intelligent and amiable girl, and my heart is drawn to her strangely; but, for some reason, she has but little to say to me. I almost know she is too much afraid of the others to speak, but, be that as it may, no chance is given her. They hover over her like buzzards over a wounded buffalo."

Yank stroked his beard meditatively.

"Yet the man is her brother, you say?"

"Yes."

"What's the names?"

"The sick girl is Zoe Rochester; her brother is named Ames Rochester; while that terrible Frenchwoman is called Madame Granville."

"A French female along, eh?"

"Yes."

"You said summut about p'ison."

"I believe they are poisoning Zoe."

"Any proof?"

"Unfortunately, I have not."

"Sort o' a general surmise, eh?"

"Really, that is all, but, Mr. Yellowbird, I feel sure I am right."

"How bad sick is she?"

"I don't believe she will live through the night."

"Land o' Goshen! that so? Then thar ain't much time. You say thar is no doctor in town. How about a parson?"

"There is none."

"Who's sheriff, or mayor, or—"

"There is not one official person in Starvation City. Everybody is mad for gold; nobody thinks of anything else."

"They don't dig gold all night, do they?"

"Hardly."

"Then why not call in a depertation o' citizens when they quit work?"

"It would be useless to try. Ames Rochester has left his sister pretty much to Madame Granville, while he has gone among the miners and secured their good-will. He has talked just right to them, and put out money very freely to buy liquor for them; and now they worship him. I tell you fairly that the men of Starvation City are a hard lot. Pity and sympathy they don't know. Bruin Dave is one of the most respectable, and you heard how he answered when I appealed to him."

Nevermiss brought his broad hand forcibly down upon the muzzle of his rifle.

"I did, by hurley!" he exclaimed. "The chab is wal named. He's a bear, an' he's a cond'mn'd mean skunk, too!"

"He is the best of the lot. Pete Hepwell, in whose house the strangers are, first laughed at and then threatened me when I spoke to him. Ames Rochester pays him well, and Hepwell would do anything for money."

"I wonder, little woman, how you kin live among sech atrocious insex," observed the mountaineer, curiously.

"I cannot, and will not. A few months ago I came here to teach Hepwell's young children. I have tried to endure the place, but had determined to leave. I shall now go as soon as this matter is settled."

"I wise decision, I consait. But about the other gal. Ef we got her out of the house, could she ride a hoss away?"

"No, indeed; I don't believe she could rise from bed!"

"Land o' Goshen! the case does look desp'r'it!" Yank agreed. "She's helpless, an' we two are her only friends. At Rochester's order, all Starvation City will rise ter help t'other side. It looks mortal bad I must say, but we ain't the persons ter throw up the sponge until the last

hope is gone. You say the sick gal ain't said the others was her inemis?"

"She has said nothing, but I can see she holds them in horror."

"Little woman, you look brave."

"Try me and see!"

Mollie's eyes sparkled, and her resolute air brought a responsive twinkle to Yank's gray eyes.

"I will. I want you ter go in an' ask her plump an' plain ef they're her friends or foes."

"Madame Granville will be there, and she will surely hear the question. I have tried to get her out of the room so I could question Zoe, but she will not go. There she stays: keen, alert, watchful and suspicious."

"Let her hear the question, then. Let her hear it, an' ef she meddles with ye, put yer foot down hard. Dare ye do it?"

"Dare I? I'll go right back and show them!"

Again Mollie's eyes sparkled, and she looked very determined, indeed. She had the happy faculty of being firm without being rude or unwomanly. Her firmness was always something to admire; she was to be admired in all moods.

"Shake hands ag'in!" quoth Nevermiss, with enthusiasm. "I like your style, by hurley! All the Yellowbirds like grit, an' they hev a poaty fair samplin' on't themselves. My gran'father, Isaiah Ebenezer Yellowbird, was a Revolutionary relict who fit like the mischief at Bunker Hill, Discord, Lexin'ton, Calfpens, Newbu'g, Pike's Peak an' other places—but never mind; go in, leetle woman, an' try yer luck, an' then come back an' make yer report. We'll wait 'round hyar, Moses an' I will; an' you kin depend on us ter help ye faithful until the tribulation is settled—you can, by hurley!"

"Thank you, my kind friend; thank you!" warmly replied the girl, and then she pressed the mountaineer's hand again and hurried away.

Yank looked after her with admiring eyes, and down upon his rifle came his hand again with great emphasis.

"I like that gal!" he asserted. "Ef thar's a pootier specimen o' female loveliness around, it must be an angel, by mighty!"

CHAPTER III.

THE OBJECT OF THE STRUGGLE.

MOLLIE re-entered the house, and went at once to the room where the sick girl lay. As Mollie had expected, Madame Granville was also present. Invalid and attendant presented a strong contrast.

The pale face on the pillow was a refined, attractive one. Zoe Rochester was a girl whom poets might well term lovely. Her hair was dark without being black, and as it now lay in some disorder around her face, it served to show more plainly the alarming pallor there visible. Refined and delicate as her face was, Zoe had undoubtedly been blessed with good health before her present illness assailed her, and not enough time had elapsed to cause emaciation. Only the want of color, and a certain dull expression, showed that she was otherwise than well. Her age seemed less than twenty-one years.

Madame Granville was thirty-five if she was a day. Once, perhaps, she had been handsome, for she had the remains of a good form and face. Time, however, had not been kind to her. It had made her figure so destitute of flesh as to show sharp angles; it had given her hollow cheeks and a haggard expression; it had given her many a thread of white in the hair which had once been jet-black; and in all ways it had laid a heavy hand upon the French lady, as though to say:

"Woman, thou art mortal!"

This particular woman was mortal enough to hate Time for her loss of good looks, but all the while discontent, plot and inward rebellion served to make more complete the wreck. She was now tall, thin-faced and slightly gray, but her great black eyes sparkled brightly, boldly, dangerously. Hers was not a good face, and the instinctive shrinking of Mollie Dixon seemed natural and wise.

Madame Granville had been born in France, and though she had married an Englishman—so she claimed—and seen life for many years in both Great Britain and America, she had never fully mastered the tongue of the men of the North.

She greeted Mollie with a sharp, suspicious glance and a low, insinuating remark, which, nevertheless, betrayed in its intonation an undercurrent of viciousness and hatred.

"Ah! is ze little mees back?" she inquired.

"Appearances indicate it, don't they?" retorted Mollie, not very amiably.

"Appearances are sometimes deceitful."

"Very!" Mollie agreed.

"Have you been take ze walk?"

"No."

"We have mees you here."

There was a manifest sneer—a desire to be disagreeable—perceptible in the remark, but Mollie paid no attention to it. She advanced to the bed, and her expression grew gentle and sympathetic as she looked at Zoe.

"How do you feel?" she asked.

The sick girl turned her gaze until it met her companion's, but it was done slowly, and with such a perceptible effort, that Mollie was freshly alarmed. Everything indicated that Zoe was much worse—that her senses were gradually drifting away.

"I feel well," was the slow, machine-like reply, a distinct pause before each word.

"Do you feel like getting up?"

"I don't know."

"Where is your brother?"

"Where is who?"

"Your brother: Mr. Rochester."

"I have forgotten. I can't talk."

Still the slow utterance; still the mechanical replies which showed that she comprehended only vaguely what was transpiring. Then her eyes closed, but not in natural sleep.

Mollie's heart sunk. She was almost positive that she had come too late; that a stupor had fallen upon the unfortunate girl which benumbed her brain and would not be lifted while she lived.

"Mees Rochester is weary," pronounced a purring voice, and as Mollie turned toward Madame Granville she met an inquisitive, suspicious glance which aroused her anger.

"What have you given her?"

"What have I gifen her?"

"That's what I asked."

The Frenchwoman threatened with her glance, but Mollie did not quail.

"Since ze little mees went, I haf given nothing."

It was a favorite notion with the daughter of France to call Mollie "ze little mees"—her way of pronouncing "the little miss"—and it was always done maliciously. The madame admired tall women. In her opinion only queenly women were worth looking at, and she sought to crush the Western girl by referring to the fact that she was small.

A more total failure than that attempt was never made.

Why does Zoe act so strangely?" Mollie asked.

"I haf said she is weary."

"It is a strange weariness."

"What do you mean?"

The question was sharp, and was accompanied by a sudden flashing of the madame's eyes. Evidently her suspicions were aroused.

"I am afraid it is something worse," returned Mollie, more prudently.

"Vat you zink it is?"

"It may be death!"

"Mon Dieu!" cried the Frenchwoman, throwing up both hands, "do not speak of zat. Ze mere idea sends ze cold shivers down my spine."

"It may well do so."

"Vat you mean by zat?"

"She is too young to die thus, in a wild place and without a doctor's care."

Madame Granville shrugged her shoulders.

"We cannot turn ze fate from its course, little mees. When ze time comes zat we are to go to ze bettaire land, vat shall it avail us if we are unwilling? Ah! little mees, we should so lif zat we s'all be ready for ze call, and zen we go away wiz ze greatest pleasaire."

"No doubt you are prepared."

"Ah! ah! Mon Dieu! speak not of zat!" cried the madame, throwing up her hands again.

Her indifference to Zoe's fate and her lively interest in herself were so in contrast that Mollie felt fresh aversion to her. She would have turned away had she not been painfully absorbed in Zoe's welfare; as it was, she was obliged to have the Frenchwoman for a companion. The latter stood close to her, and her bold, black eyes first dwelt upon the still face upon the pillow and then studied the fresh-tinted countenance of the Western girl.

It dawned upon Mollie that the woman, believing fully in her superior ability, was trying to read her and never doubting she could do so; and Mollie's pride arose.

It became a battle between them.

"Haf you heard whether news haf been received of any doctor?" the madame asked.

"No."

"Our Zoe needs him sorely."

"As I have said before, there is no doctor near Starvation City, and I believe that if one is found he will come too late."

"Does ze little mees think our Zoe will die?"

"I am not used to sick people, but I see but little hope, I admit."

"Zese brain-troubles are so bad!" sighed the Frenchwoman.

"Do you think that is her trouble?"

"She haf all ze symptom."

"Did you ever see a case like it?"

"Only in ze brain-trouble."

Mollie laid her hand caressingly upon the unconscious girl's forehead.

"Poor child!" she murmured.

"It ees ver' sad," the madame agreed, as she temporarily covered her eyes with her handkerchief. "We s'all have been so disappointed! We start out to see ze wild, ze noble West, and zis is ze end."

"Why did you come to Starvation City?"

"Mon Dieu! why? What evil fate drive us here? We hear it said zat zis was ze wildest of

tion City, and there was but little to oppose his greedy demands. Heretofore, the camp had been a very healthy place, and a doctor would have found no employment, but a sudden change had occurred. The semi-weekly stage had brought three strangers to the camp, and one was dying.

Such was the news that went abroad, and the miners ceased their work for awhile to converse on the subject. They were unusually rough men; they were less honest and kind-hearted than the average of their kind; death was a companion they had met before in their wild life, and they had little sympathy for any one but themselves; yet in this case there was an element which interested them.

The person alleged to be dying was a woman. The strangers were staying in Pete Hepwell's house—Starvation City could not boast of a hotel—and late in the afternoon a girl came out of the house and stood hesitatingly at the door. She did not look to be in ill health, for she was plump of form and brown of face, but that pleasant, attractive face bore an anxious expression as she gazed around.

Evidently she had some purpose in mind, but did not know exactly how to execute it.

She ended by starting away toward the north, and when she had reached the second shanty she came in sight of two persons, both of whom were men. The first was quite near her, and was just starting away from the shanty with a pick on his shoulder. The second was further away, and was sitting near the shanty on a rock, with a long rifle resting on his knees and a dog lying at his feet.

The girl accosted the nearer man.

"Bruin Dave, may I speak with you?" she asked.

"Why, certain, Mollie," he answered. "I was jest goin' ter work, but I hev time fur you, I reckon."

"It is about the sick woman."

"Oh! is it?"

The man's voice showed a sudden falling off of interest.

"Yes. She is sick and terribly in need of friends—"

"Ain't she got two with her?"

"A man and a woman are with her, but—" here Mollie glanced around to see that no unfriendly ears could catch her words—"I shouldn't want such friends, myself."

"Who be all these folks?"

"The sick woman is Zoe Rochester; the man is her brother, Ames Rochester; the other woman is called Madame Granville; and they—"

"I know their names," interrupted Bruin Dave, "but who be they—"

"I only know that they are from the East."

"What be they doin' hyar?"

"That I don't know. But, Dave, listen to me: Zoe Rochester is ill, terribly ill; and I am afraid she is going to die. That isn't the worst of it. Her brother should be her friend, but I am afraid he and Madame Granville, the Frenchwoman, are her worst enemies. There is some mystery about it, Dave; I don't know what. I wish I did. Zoe must realize that she is near death, but that isn't what she is thinking of. She just lies there with an awful terror in her dark eyes, and when her brother or the Frenchwoman comes near her, she shrinks away in horror."

"That's odd!" muttered Dave.

"It's worse; it is horrible. Dave, there is some wicked plot against that poor girl, and her false friends are killing her!"

"Killing her?"

"Yes."

"What do you mean?"

"I don't believe her illness is natural; I think they are deliberately killing her with poison, for some horrible reason."

"How d'ye know this?"

"I don't know it—I surmise it."

"No other reason?"

"No-o; no real reason. But can't I see? Can't I see Zoe is in an awful terror, and that she shrinks away from them? Can't I see that their so-called sympathy is all put on? They are as cold as ice at heart, and I believe they will be glad when she is dead."

"Wal, I ain't no doctor."

"You are a human being, ain't you?" retorted Mollie, quickly, a red spot appearing in each cheek.

"Hum! Wal, what kin we do?"

"We can drive Ames Rochester and Madame Granville away, and take charge of Zoe."

"Is that why you come ter me?"

"Yes."

Bruin Dave shifted the pick to his other shoulder.

"I hope you'll excuse me, Mollie," he indifferently returned. "I'd like ter oblige ye, but when it comes ter interferin' with a man's household fam'ly, I ain't thar. Besides, time is money in Starvation City. My claim lays idle over yon in the gulch, an' it's time I was at work. So-long, Mollie!"

The miner nodded carelessly, and then walked off as indifferent to the sick woman's fate as though she had been a sick kitten, instead of one of God's most sacred creatures.

Mollie's face flushed again, and she looked

after him with eyes sparkling with indignation, but her mood quickly changed. Tears dimmed her eyes, and her pretty face grew sad and downcast.

"No one will help me!" she exclaimed, tremulously.

The man who had been sitting upon the rock suddenly rose. Mollie had noticed him casually before, but had supposed the foregoing conversation inaudible to him. His hearing, however, was quickly shown to be remarkably acute. He advanced toward her, bearing his long rifle and followed by the dog.

"Little woman," he said, with an earnest air, "don't say that! The miner may not be willin' ter help ye, but thar are other men in town."

Mollie directed her gaze to the speaker's face. He was a stranger to her, but his face had an honest expression which was the best of recommendations.

"I have spoken to three men besides Dave," she answered.

"Thar are still others."

"I'm afraid you don't know the men of Starvation City, sir. Just now they are all crazy over gold-digging, and if they were not, it wouldn't make much difference. Truth compels me to say that they are a hard lot of men. Sympathy they know little about, and they had rather play cards, drink and fight than help anybody."

The stranger fell to stroking his beard in a perturbed way.

"Land o' Goshen!" he replied, "they don't seem ter be a good lot ter draw helpers from. How many aids do ye want, little woman?"

"I don't know how many are needed, but it would be a great relief to me to get one."

The man allowed the breech of his rifle to fall heavily to the ground.

"I'm a total stranger in this camp," he observed, "an I dar' say you don't know me. Mebbe you don't want ter trust a stranger, but I say to you, true an' hearty, that ef anybody needs help I'm willin' ter do my best. It's a fundermental principle o' my fam'ly ter help the needy an' desarvin', an' I'd be false ter the fam'ly pedigree ef I stood idle an' seen any atrocious insex do a mean act ter the weak an' unfortinit. I have my leetle weaknesses, but I consait want o' feelin' ain't one on 'em. I do hope so, by hurley!"

He struck his open hand upon the barrel of his rifle, and his plain, honest face beamed with an earnest expression which made a new impression upon Mollie.

For a time she forgot the sick woman.

"Are you a miner?" she asked.

"Can't say I be. I never took to it much, fur it keeps a man too much tied up; an' I like ter be free ter come an' go as the fancy strikes me. It has struck me a good 'eal, by the way, an' I've tramped over an egregious lot o' ground in my day. No, I ain't a miner; I'm a simple old hunter an' mountaineer."

"What is your name? if I may ask."

"It is Yank Yellowbird."

"It is?"

"Yes."

"I thought so."

"Land o' Goshen! you don't mean it! How'd you guess it, little woman?"

"I have heard of you before. Isn't your dog named Moses?"

"He is!" cried the mountaineer, his face lightin' up with delight. "His name is Moses, sure as you live. So you've heerd o' him, too?"

"Oh, yes!"

"D'ye hear that, dog?" demanded the dog's master, as he turned to his shaggy companion. "Yer name an' fame has gone abroad over the land, so that even the pooty gals have heerd. I'm proud for ye, Moses, an' I consait you be, too. Can't ye say so, dog?"

Moses did not say so, and it is no injustice to him to suppose that he could not. Perhaps, too, he would not have said so if he could, for he was not so amiable-looking as his master. A grim, dignified, morose-looking dog was Moses, but the young lady noticed that the eyes which were turned upon her were honest eyes, and she reached out her hand toward his head.

Yank looked a bit anxious, for if Moses had one distinguishing quality, it was aversion to all creatures, human or otherwise, except his master; but on this occasion he not only allowed Mollie to caress his shaggy head, but his tail began to vibrate quite briskly.

"Land o' Goshen!" the mountaineer exclaimed, "I didn't think that o' the dog. He's usually sharp an' crusty ter all but me, but he seems ter taken a mortal great likin' ter you. Shows his good sense, too."

"I'm afraid, Mr. Yellowbird, you are given to flattery," Mollie returned, with a smile.

"Not an artom!—not an artom!" Yank declared. "I'm a plain old mountaineer, egregiously beset with a case o' chronic an' malignant newrolgy, an' with a left foot that is a coward; but I have eyes. Some faces I like, an' I hope you don't mind my sayin' yours is one on 'em."

He looked at the girl sharply, but so kindly that she could not feel offended.

"Certainly not," she answered; "I am glad to

receive a compliment from such a noted man as Yank Yellowbird."

"Folks talk on me, I know. I hope they don't say no hurt on me!"

"Indeed, they do not; they only praise you. You are known far and near as the enemy of evil-doers, and the friend of the good and deserving. Men say you are the bravest, the most honest, the most fearless—"

The mountaineer stopped her with a gesture.

"Never mind, little woman. 'Tis my friends says that, an' though I thank 'em, it is too flatterin' fur a plain old mountaineer!"

CHAPTER II.

THE MOUNTAINEER'S PROMISE.

YANK shook his head gravely, and then, as a whimsical smile appeared on his bronzed face, he raised his hand and, pointing his index finger toward Mollie, waved it regularly as he added:

"I'm about as plain as they make 'em, but I must allow I came of a very remarkable fam'ly. The Yellowbirds trace their ancestry back ter Adam Yellowbird, o' Eden Garden—he married Eve Smith—an' we hev the record right down ter the present time without a skip. We hev turned out some egregious smart men, an' furnished Yellowbirds ter ev'ry perfession in life but States' Prison convicts—we skip that—an' the pedigree don't show a flaw on't. We aim ter be upright in our daily walk, though we may have some leetle weaknesses."

"No doubt such an old family is illustrious," agreed Mollie, much influenced by Yank's genial conceit.

"Mebbe I'll tell ye more about 'em some time. That reminds me ter say, I ain't heerd your name, yet."

"It is Mollie Dixon."

"B'long in these parts?"

"No. I have been here only a short time. I came from California."

"I noticed ye yesterday, little woman, as you went through the village, an' I hope you'll excuse an old borderman ef I say I liked your looks egregiously."

"I'm afraid your judgment was not of the best, but I certainly can't be offended."

"I should be glad," added the mountaineer, with signs of emotion, "ef you would let me be your frien'. I'm a plain old trumper o' mountain, forest an' prairie, but thar is warm places in my heart, an' you sorter seem to hev touched me deep. Had you jest as soon take my hand?"

"Gladly! and I shall be proud to number Yank Yellowbird among my friends!"

His bronzed face lighted up with pleasure, but it was noticeable that he only momentarily retained the plump little hand she placed in his broad palm.

There was a brief silence, during which the two half-unconsciously regarded each other more critically.

Mollie Dixon was twenty-two years old. She was below the average height and weight of her sex, but her form was noticeable for its full development. As Yank afterward observed, she was "as plump as a partridge," and no one could justly find fault with her form. Her face was pretty without being handsome, her features being just the least bit irregular; but it was a wonderfully bright, pleasant, intelligent, attractive face, and the young man who would deny her right to be called pretty must be stony-hearted, indeed. She was simply dressed, but with remarkable good taste.

Yank Yellowbird had seen fifty-five years of life. He was tall, rather slender and loosely made, and as his well-worn, fringed bunting-suit was far too large for him, his figure appeared unshapely and odd. He was, however, as straight as any boy, and those who had experimented knew that wonderful strength lurked in his long arms. Besides his old-fashioned garments, he wore a cap made from the skin of some animal, with the fur left on, and he had an old-fashioned look to match his clothes, though age seemed to have made no impression upon him.

His face was peculiar in more than one way. No one could deny that he was homely. He had a wide mouth, large nose, small eyes and prominent cheek-bones; his flaxen hair and his light-brown, many-colored beard were long and thin, but to oppose all this were many marked points. A more honest face was never seen, and around the mouth and eyes were signs of good-humor and whimsical conceits. Plainly, only some great, good cause could ruffle his cheerful temper, but, in emergencies, the comical mouth could grow stern, and the mild gray eyes become threatening and severe.

This man was widely known in half of the new West. Intelligent and brave to a proverbial degree, he liked best of all to wander over the wildest part of the West with his dog and long, old-fashioned rifle for his companions, but when he knew of a wrong to redress, his idle wandering ceased, and he became the dreaded foe of the evil-doer, and the resolute defender of the worthy.

At times he had fought hostile Indians, and great was his fame in this field of operations, to the Indians' sorrow. Among them he was

all ze towns, so here we come. Zen our poor Zoe fall seek—ah! ah! it was so ver' sad!"

The Frenchwoman operated mercilessly upon her eyes with the handkerchief, but, to Mollie, this appearance of grief seemed a mockery and a sham. She was more than even convinced that the volatile Frenchwoman was as dangerous as she was deceitful.

Mollie turned away and sat down by the window. She wanted an opportunity to weigh the evidence and decide on her own course.

Present circumstances indicated that she had found an ally too late, and that all of Yank Yellowbird's skill and bravery would not avail anything against the new foe that menaced Zoe Rochester. Unless Mollie was greatly in error, the dull apathy which had settled upon the invalid was a stupor which would end in death.

She doubted if Zoe ever spoke coherently again.

Mollie was working only upon suspicion, but she believed that a mystery and a crime confronted her. She could not forget the nervous, shrinking, terrified manner with which Zoe had regarded Ames Rochester and Madame Granville. Clearly, she was very much in fear of them—whether she had regarded her life as being in danger Mollie was not sure.

The Western girl suspected that Zoe had been decoyed to Starvation City with the worst of motives, and that her life was deliberately being taken in a camp where no doctor could be found who would expose the crime.

If this was so, what was the object?

Ames Rochester was Zoe's own brother; at least, he claimed the relationship, she had never denied it, and there was certainly a resemblance between them.

If he was now poisoning her, what was the object?"

Mollie had seen enough of the world to know that there might be several objects. All brothers are not true to the sacred requirements of relationship and honor, and, in Mollie's opinion, Ames Rochester's face was indicative of an evil nature.

But another question arose. Zoe had seemed to be in great mental distress, and to regard her two companions with positive fear. If such was the case, why had she come to the miners' camp with them? And if, as seemed probable, she believed them to be seeking her life, why had she failed to make her suspicions known?

Until a very short time before she had had full possession of her mental faculties, but not a word of accusation or rebellion had passed her lips.

Mollie was greatly perplexed, but her meditations ended when she perceived that Madame Granville was watching her sharply. The long-headed Frenchwoman was suspicious, also, and the Western girl felt that she would not hesitate to poison any other person who might stand in the way of her schemes.

Remembering that Yank Yellowbird was waiting for her, Mollie determined to settle one point, and that was to learn if Zoe was actually past the point of coherent speech and thought.

This point settled, her would-be friends could more easily determine their course of conduct.

Mollie bent her energies to the task of finding some good excuse for trying to arouse the sick girl. Ames Rochester might at any moment return, and though he was not as shrewd as Madame Granville, he was more open and impulsive.

CHAPTER IV.

DANGEROUS WORK TO DO.

MOLLIE found the desired excuse, and, much to her surprise, Madame Granville did not oppose her. An effort was made to arouse Zoe, but it was a complete failure. No sign of consciousness could be gained; she lay with closed eyes, and was wholly irresponsible to their attempt.

They had just abandoned the effort when Ames Rochester entered.

He was a tall, slender man of twenty-five years. He had a fairly-good form, and many persons would have called him good-looking. Mollie, however, from the first believed that his face indicated a cold, cruel, unscrupulous nature, and she now regarded him much the same as she would a rattlesnake. With his dark hair and eyes, and general formation of features, he certainly did resemble Zoe, but there was with him no trace of the refinement which so distinguished his sister.

Entering with a quick, light step, he looked toward Zoe first of all.

"Is she sleeping?" he asked.

"My poor friend! I fear very much it is worse," sighed the Frenchwoman.

Rochester made a great start.

"Surely, you do not mean—"

"She is unconscious, and we cannot arouse ze poor child."

"In a stupor, eh? That is bad."

He advanced quickly to the bed and, stooping, kissed his sister with an appearance of great affection. He then pronounced her name, but she gave no sign. His expression became

very grave, and he first laid his hand upon her forehead and then felt her pulse. He shook his head gravely.

"I may be wrong, but it seems to me her forehead is very clammy, and her pulse alarmingly weak. Miss Dixon, will you investigate?"

Mollie obeyed. Her uneasiness increased when she found him right in both particulars. She confessed the latter fact.

"This is alarming!" murmured Rochester.

"It s'all be a ver' unhappy hour if our poor Zoe is worse!" pronounced the Frenchwoman, gloomily.

"Oh! for a doctor!" cried the brother.

"I fear it is too late now," answered Mollie.

"Do you think—"

Rochester's voice grew husky with real or feigned emotion; it failed entirely, and he turned away.

"Poor Zoe!" murmured Madame Granville, clasping her hands.

Mollie's face flushed. She believed both her companions to be acting a hypocritical part, and she could hardly restrain her indignation. Not a word passed her lips, though; she gazed at Zoe with the painful conviction that death was very near.

Why must it be so? Why must one so beautiful good and young die under such circumstances in that remote mountain camp?

"I will go to Yank Yellowbird again!"

This was her unspoken idea, and she turned away and left the room without a word. She no longer looked to the mountaineer to save Zoe, but, with no other friend upon whom she could rely, she looked forward in imagination to his plain, honest, kind face and sympathetic voice for consolation.

Leaving the house, she only waited to make sure she was not watched, and then went to where she had left Nevermiss. He was still there, calmly keeping his vigil, and attended by his gaunt dog.

His face brightened at sight of Mollie.

"Glad ter see you back, little woman," he said, heartily. "What's the news?"

Mollie told her story in as few words as possible, yet with such directness, precision and graphic power that Nevermiss did not need to ask any questions. That he was as much troubled as she had been became clear, and he fell to stroking his thin beard with quick, anxious movements.

"It's an egregious triberlation!" he exclaimed.

Mollie answered with a sigh.

"You think it's too late fur a doctor now?" added the mountaineer.

"I doubt if Zoe lives until morning."

"Then we can't save her by makin' a raid on the atrocious insex."

"We are too late to save her, but not too late for vengeance."

"Not much, we ain't," Yank declared. "You are right to a dot, little woman. It ain't never too late ter take just vengeance on mean scamps while they're alive. Ef the poor young woman has sunk inter a trance which is a fore-runner o' death, an' no doctor ain't ter be had, we are about helpless; but we want ter know whether she died by fair or foul means."

"How can we know?"

"Can't we stir up the miners ter ask fur an investigation?"

"I have told you, friend Yank, that Ames Rochester's money has bought them up, body, mind and soul."

"Mebbe a leetle choice English would stir their sleepy idees. Ef I go ter them an' say that a murder is bein' done hyar, an' they refuse ter heed me, what if I say ter them, 'Do ye want me ter go out ter the other towns an' tell 'em Starvation City stands up fur rascals and murderers?'"

"Do you think that would do any good?" asked Mollie, dubiously.

"I can't see no other way. I've took stand ag'in' big odds afore now, but I ain't so conceited as ter think I kin wrastle three-score men down alone. Words are better'n blows ag'in' sech odds."

"There is one thing not known to you, maybe."

"What's that?"

"I have told you the men of this camp are hard, unscrupulous and revengeful. If you say to them that you will spread their reputation, or in any way work against them, they will become your bitter enemies, and it would be just like them to shoot you down without a word of warning."

A slight flush appeared in the veteran's cheeks and he smote the barrel of his rifle with his hard hand in the old way.

"Let 'em try it!" he exclaimed. "Let 'em try it ef they dare. Fur be it from me ter turn boaster, fur it would be a blot on the Yellowbird pedigree ef I descended ter sech empty show; but I've fit Injuns, b'ars an' atrocious two-legged insex a good many year, an' I ain't ter be thrashed by these scamps. The Yellowbirds hate ter be put down. My gran'father, the Revolutionary War relict, always teached me that. 'Member one lesson he gi'n me egregeous wal. I's goin' ter school, then, an' another boy thrashed me, an' I come home with

my eye lookin' like an Injun in black paint, an' the eend o' my nose pooty bad broozed.

"What in all natur' is the matter wi' ye?" sez my gran'father, holdin' up both hands.

"Peter Boggese hit me," sez I, whimperin'.

"Did he do all that?" sez my gran'father.

"Yes, an' more," sez I; "I'm mortal sore under the cuticle," sez I.

"You let Peter lick ye?" sez gran'father.

"He didn't ask my leave, but jest waded in an' licked me," sez I, clawin' the big tears out o' my eyes.

"An' what was you doin' all the while?" sez my gran'father.

"I's tryin' ter run away," sez I.

"My gran'father riz right up out o' his cheer, an' his specks trembled egregiously on his nose—a suo sign he was stirred up mentally like hurley.

"Was ye doin' anything but run?" sez he.

"I's hollerin' like the mischief," sez I.

"You was?" sez my gran'father, in a voice like a small thunder-clap; "you, a Yellowbird, was runnin' away an' hollerin'! Oh! oh!" sez my gran'father, clawin' out a barn'ful o' his hair. "Onregenerate youth!" sez he, mournful, "was it fur this I fit at Bunker Hill, Discord an' t'other places? Has the fam'ly pedigree come to this? Will a Yellowbird run from any foe? Boy," sez he, almost dancin' with anger, "you ain't through with this scrape, yet. You go right over ter Boggese's an' lick Peter, an' don't ye come back hyar until ye do it, or I'll take that beech stick an' lay it onter yer legs like pison. Thar never was a Yellowbird got beat in a fight yit," sez my gran'father proudly, "an' ef you are ter be licked, I'm goin' ter be the party ter do it!"

"Wal, I consait the idee didn't please me at all, but the old gentleman was so voy'lent in his manner that I dasent say a word; so over I went ter Peter Boggese's house an' we begun all over. When I got back t'other eye was blacked an' the skin was pooty nigh all gone from my face; but when I tol' my gran'father the fack that I'd got Peter down, set on his stummick an' made him beg fur marcy like the mischief, besides blackin' his eyes right bad, my gran'father was so tickled he cried for joy; an' he let me play wi' his sojer-muskit, an' told me how he used ter thrash the Britishers in old times.

"Sence then I've stood up fur the Yellowbird pedigree at all times, an' I find it's a heap cheaper in the eend."

This reminiscence had been given with a dry humor and earnestness which was peculiarly Yank's own, and the attention Mollie gave him put the mountaineer in the best possible spirits.

He suddenly became sober, however.

"I was forgettin' the poor sick gal—I was, sure's the world. I hope you'll excuse me fur wan'drin' from the subjick. Have you an idee?"

"I really don't know how we ought to proceed."

"Mebbe I kin plan. You go back ter the house an' watch, an' I'll risk my luck tryin' ter make the miners ashamed o' themselves. You see they're comin' home fur the night."

"I hope you'll succeed, but I advise you to be very careful, mountaineer. You have been so kind, so very kind to me, that I should feel terribly if you got into trouble for my sake."

"Land o' Goshen! it's the greatest pleasure in the world. Why, I'd gladly risk my tough old body any time jest ter hear the music o' yer voice, an' ter look inter them big, gray eyes o' yours. Don't be offended, little woman, fur I'm a plain old man, but that is that about your way that pleases me most amazin'ly."

"You are very kind, Mr. Yellowbird, but let us think only of Miss Rochester. I will go to the house. My fears are so strong that I want to make one agreement. If such a great misfortune as her death should occur, I will place a signal in the northeast window. You see that we have a rude curtain their. If you see a handkerchief pinned on the outer side of the curtain you may know—" here Mollie hesitated for a moment, and then added in an unsteady voice—"you may know that Zoe is past human aid!"

She turned partially away; then paused to give Nevermiss her hand.

"Thank you, kind friend; thank you very much!" she added.

A moment more and she was hurrying back toward the house.

Yank looked after her and stroked his beard zealously.

"A pooty little woman—a most egregious pooty woman, by hurley! I've rarely seen her ekal, an' I've met all sorts, an' helped a good many out o' mortal bad triberlations an' distresses. I'll try ter help Mollie. Moses, dog, rouse up. We've got ter go an' see them miners ar' as they're so hard-hearted we may find the job o' convincin' em an' egregeous obtuse p'int. Come on, Moses, an' we'll tackle 'em right away!"

CHAPTER V.

A DEADLY TRAIL TO FOLLOW.

Two hours passed before the mountaineer returned to his post. In the interim night had fallen, and Yank and his dog came back through the darkness.

The former did not move with the determined

step he had shown when he went away. He had made his attempt and failed; he had tried to interest the miners in Zoe Rochester and met with indifference and worse. Nearly all the men had bluntly observed that their business was gold-digging, and they did not care a cent for Zoe Rochester or any other woman.

Other men had asked the tall veteran what business he had to come to Starvation City and undertake to show them how to run the place. They declared their ability to manage their own affairs, and added that if any outsider did not like their way, he had better keep off their ground. And these surly words were accompanied with ugly looks which could be taken as nothing less than a threat.

In all this Yank saw the power of Ames Rochester. He realized that Mollie had been right when she declared that Rochester, with money, liquor and specious words, had bought the men of the camp "body, mind and soul."

As before stated, there was a menace in their words and looks, but Nevermiss remained peaceable. He was not cowed, for all Starvation City could not frighten him; but he would not say one word which might make the sick girl's chances poorer.

He returned, however, in a serious, downcast mood. The outlook was dark and unpromising of good.

Almost mechanically he went to the place where he had before seen Mollie, and he was so deep in thought that he started as she suddenly appeared before him.

"I have been waiting for you," she said quickly.

"Is that anything new?" he asked, even more quickly.

"Have you looked for the signal in the window?"

"I ain't had a chance. You surely don't mean—"

"The signal is there."

"Merciful heavens! you don't mean that's bad news?"

"What I feared has come to pass. Zoe is gone!"

The mountaineer moved uneasily.

"I'm mortal sorry ter hear it."

"She ceased to breathe over half an hour ago, though no one knew just when she died. Her life passed quietly away. It is one consolation to know that she did not suffer, but my whole nature rises in rebellion against her untimely, sad fate."

"Do you still think as ye did?"

"Most decidedly, yes! Ames Rochester pretended to shed tears, and Madame Granville lamented loudly, but there was no sincerity in their so-called grief. I am surer than ever that there was foul play, and that they brought her here with the worst of designs in their evil hearts. Oh! Yank, what dark mystery is connected with this affair?"

"I can't imagine, by hurley! Be you sure Ames Rochester was her brother?"

"Yes."

"Then why should he do her harm?"

"Ask his own black heart; I do not know. But I am convinced that there is a deep plot behind it all, and I wish the truth could be known."

Yank thumped the breech of his rifle upon the ground.

"It shall! Fate has been ag'in' us in our wish ter stop the crime, but justice ain't out o' our reach. What is Rochester goin' ter do now?"

"They leave here early in the morning for Duffy's Drift, the next camp southeast of here; and they will take the body with them."

"I shall go, too!" declared the mountaineer. "Not in their party—not much, I won't—but I shall be along the trail. I have a hoss outside this village, an' I'll mount an' foller whar they go. All camps ain't like this atrocious place, an' once they strike an honest town, I'll appear ter them, give a few p'ints ter the officers o' the town, an' demand that it be made plain what complaint the unfortinit young woman had. Thar shall be light on the subjick ef I kin git at it!"

"Thank you! thank you!" Mollie exclaimed. "You are proving that you are the same noble man of whom I have often heard. Yank Yellowbird is a synonym for the defender of the weak and persecuted."

"I consait I be the nat'r'al enemy of all atrocious insex."

"I beg, though, that you will not make any move against them until you are sure you are among honest men who will aid you faithfully."

"Wal, I'll try ter be wise an' prudent."

"I shall want to know the result."

"You shall."

"To-morrow I, too, leave here. No longer can I endure the society of these men who, one and all, turned away from me when I appealed to them, and allowed this iniquitous work to go on. I am going to Good Luck, a mining-town forty miles away. There I will wait until I hear from you."

"You shall hear, fur I'll make that a part o' my duty, an' I'm mortal glad you're goin' away. I should be no way contented ter think of you

stayin' hyar with sech mean critters 'round ye. Go ter Good Luck, by all means, little woman."

"Shall I see you again here?"

"Prob'lly not. I sha'n't be visible ter many folks. I don't keer ter sleep under any roof in this camp. Do ye see the tall pine over on the cliff?"

"Yes."

"I'll sleep thar, ter-night. If you want me, come thar, but be careful o' yourself."

"It is not likely I shall see you there, but I hope you will come to Good Luck in person."

"So I will—to be sure."

"Then let us say good-by, for now!"

She extended her hand, and his fingers closed around it.

"I wish ye good luck, Mollie," he said, with an earnest utterance. "I sha'n't forget my pooty girl-party right away. You've come ter me with a recommendation ev'rybody can't boast on—you've taken up in the sacred cause o' humanity fur one a total stranger to you, jest because she was a suff'rin' sister-woman. The Master o' Life, who has an eye fur the good an' the bad at all times, won't forget it in ye. Neither will I. Thar is a rough shell on my weather-beaten body, little 'un, but I know a noble heart when I meet its persessor. Good-by, an' good luck!"

His voice had sunk to a low key, but it did not lose its earnest inflection, and some strong emotion seemed to shake his mind.

He quickly aroused and added in his old, light, whimsical way:

"Cheer up, an' don't doubt that it'll all be right in the eend. Tribulations an' distresses will come, but they pass away. I've had a heap on 'em. Had measles so bad I looked like a b'iled lobster, an' when I took the whoopin'-cough I yelled so like hurley that I driv all the Injuns out o' the business, an' out o' the neighborhood. I wa'n't no common boy, fur the Yellowbirds hev more mortal bad diffikilties than common folks, but I wa'n't ter be put down. I conquered all but the newrolgy, which still hangs to me in a malevolent an' voy' lent form."

The mountaineer seemed capable of talking on indefinitely, but he was not unconscious of the lapse of time, and he proceeded to finish his interview with Mollie.

They separated; she returned to the house; and then he called to the grim dog and walked away. He did not pause until he reached the pine tree he had mentioned. There he sat down and looked back at the dim lights of the village.

Moses went close to his side and lay down, and the mountaineer mechanically rested one hand on the animal's head. It was no hardship for this strange pair to pass the night without cover other than that vouchsafed by nature. They had traveled over half of the West, sleeping under the canopy of heaven, and Yank liked it better than any other way.

An hour after daybreak, the following morning Ames Rochester and his party left the village in the stage. At the rear, in the place usually allotted to trunks, was a plain, oblong box which needed no explanation to the solitary man who watched the scene from a thicket on a neighboring cliff.

This man was Yank Yellowbird, and when they were out of sight, moving along the trail to Duffy's Drift, he mounted his own horse and, followed by Moses, took the trail.

That was the way he intended to make the pursuit; if he rode forward into view, suspicion might be aroused; he proposed to rely wholly upon the trail.

As he had come by the same way when he made his entrance to Starvation City, he was not upon wholly new ground. This proved of importance to him before the journey ended. All the forenoon the stage rolled on briskly, and as the horses were good, and the way remarkably open and level considering its elevation, noon found them within eight miles of Duffy's Drift. They halted, had dinner and resumed their way.

Then came a surprise. They turned from the trail and struck off in a direction at right angles with their former course.

Yank Yellowbird frowned when he made the discovery. He was not well enough acquainted with the vicinity to say positively that the new course was not a second trail to Duffy's Drift, but, with every instinct inclined to suspicion, he was emphatically of the opinion that the latter camp could not be thus reached.

In his opinion, the deviation was further proof of scheming which would not bear the light of day, and he doubted if they ever intended to go to Duffy's Drift. Along the new way there were signs of previous travel which indicated that it led to some town, but Nevermiss had no means of knowing where.

He still kept well back, and his alertness increased.

Hours passed; five o'clock came, and the journey had not ended.

The mountaineer was riding through a gulch. On each side was an acclivity, with a wild confusion of rocks and bushes. A moment before, Yank had gained view of the stage in the dis-

tance, and knew that it was one-fourth of a mile in advance. As Ames Rochester and the driver had been the only men to go with the stage, the pursuer had no reason to anticipate danger. Danger, however, was near at hand, as he soon found to his cost.

Suddenly there was a stinging sensation along his head; the report of a revolver sounded; and his horse gave a violent leap to one side. It had been a long while since the veteran was thrown from the saddle, but this time he went off like a flash.

He fell heavily, unable to save himself in the least, and the shock was almost stunning. A weaker man might have remained prostrate, but Yank promptly struggled to his knees. Then he saw three men springing toward him from the thicket which had before concealed them.

Nevermiss realized that he had been ambushed, and he grasped his fallen rifle and sprung to his feet. The foremost man fired again, and the bullet cut away a lock of hair from Yank's head.

The mountaineer's blood was up. He realized that murder was intended, and with a panther-like leap he sprung to meet the desperadoes. He knew he would have one ally—Moses—and that faithful friend was by his side.

A sweep of the rifle felled one enemy, but the others were upon him before he could strike again. He drew his knife and warded off the first blow, but his left arm was pierced by a keen blade a moment later. The deed was barely done before Moses dragged the ruffian to the ground with a tenacious, deadly grip upon his throat.

Yank and his remaining foe gave blow for blow, but not a word passed their lips. It was a fight to the death.

The veteran's superiority was quickly shown, but, just as he was driving the man resistlessly back, he who had been felled with the rifle reappeared. He came at the wrong time, and struck to such good advantage that he drove his deadly knife into Yank's side. Then the mountaineer, who was dazed from the effect of the first shot, was doubly beset, and he had never been in poorer condition to fight against odds.

Yet, fight he did, heroically. He was losing blood in an alarming way, but he rallied and held both men at bay. He gave blow for blow, and try as they would they could not deal him another severe wound.

He found himself growing weak, and knew he must settle the struggle soon or lose his life. He gathered all his energies for one supreme effort. He wielded his knife with surprising power; it interposed a shield of steel to the strokes of his adversaries, and with wonderful force he drove both back.

Alarmed and angry, they added fierce imprecations to their other efforts, but not a word passed Yank's lips. He was watching for his chance, and it soon came. With a lunge he put one of the pair out of the fight forever, and then turned upon the survivor.

The fellow wheeled to flee, but he was too late. Yank's knife was driven home, while, at the same moment Moses, who had disposed of his own enemy, sprung at the fugitive's throat and bore him to the ground.

Yank Yellowbird, staggering almost blindly, looked around, but no living adversary remained. Then the tall mountaineer, mechanically grasping at the wound in his side, fell fainting and unconscious to the earth.

CHAPTER VI.

PARADISE SAM APPEARS.

Two weeks have passed since the fight in the gulch, and through another gulch a man and dog are slowly moving. The man travels with the aid of a stout staff, while the dog carries a long rifle which is strapped to his back.

They are Yank Yellowbird and his faithful canine friend. Moses is the same grim dog, but Nevermiss is by no means the same rugged mountaineer. His movements are slow and feeble, and indicative of extreme bodily weakness. The rifle is tied to Moses's back because its owner has not sufficient strength to carry it—indeed, he would find it next to impossible to walk without the aid of the staff. As it is, he cannot walk far at a time.

Moving perseveringly, even if slowly, he finally reached a big rock and sat down by its side. It was a good support, and he leaned against it and drew a sigh of deep weariness. His expression was very grave, but as he looked at Moses the old, humorous smile broke out on his face.

"I'll be condemned ef you don't look mortal queer, dog, a-carryin' that bit o' iron! You do it right wal, but you ain't got what my gran'-father would call a milit'y figger. You're strong, Moses, but you don't understand the tick-tacks o' war. My gran'-father was powerfully set on them, an' it would jest about make yer hair raise up on yer back ter bear him tell how he fit at Bunker Hill. He hasn't earned the tick-tacks then, fur he'd only jest enlisted, but he had a pitchfork, an' the way he jabbed it inter the inemy must a' be'n egregious funny. I consait he was an artom ha'sh ter the Brit-

ishers, my gran'father was; but he'd left his red-top grass all cut down in the south medder when he enlisted, an' he had ter pitch somethin'. He did it, too, by hurley!"

"The mountaineer stroked his beard with a hand which had grown perceptibly thinner."

"I wish you'd knowed my gran'father, Moses," he resumed. "You would 'a' taken a mortal sight o' pleasure in it, unless he'd got at ye with that birch stick o' his'n which he used ter apply ter my legs when he felt in need o' exercise. He used ter thrash me like the mischief, but 'twas all done for my good. He wanted ter give me p'ints ont he tick-tacks o' war, an' make me worthy o' the Yellowbirds o' arly days, such as Adam, the gardener; Noah, the sailor; Samson, the great wrastler; Joshua, the big militia general; an' Moses, who was lost in the wilderness. I named you fur him, dog, as you may reck'lect."

The dog rubbed his nose against his master's knee.

"Like ter hear the stories 'bout the famly pedigree, don't ye, Moses? I'll give ye more pootoo soon, but speakin' o' bein' lost has sorter took my mind from the subjick. Ef ever anybody was lost, it's us, dog. We ain't in no wilderness, but we're in the wild mountains, an' it seems an egregious bad place ter git out on. I'd reelli like ter know whar we be. It may be one mile ter a town, nn' it may be thirty. Ef it's the last, we'll prob'y be two months on the trip. Ef I knowed a baby with legs as weak as mine, I'll be condemn'd ef I wouldn't pity him. Sometimes, though, I think these legs ain't mine, anyhow. Mebbe they got swapped off fur mine, while I's sick."

He looked down at the members in question, and then smiled in his quaint way.

"No use ter try an' git out on't that way. Them is the same old legs that have carried me so many mile, an' right good legs they be, too, ef they are weak now. I can't expect 'em ter be muskelar when they ain't had a pint o' blood in 'em fur a fortnight. I'm an egregious weak sister, Moses!"

The mountaineer sighed again, but nothing could drive the cheerful expression from his face. He had been near death, but was on the road to recovery, and all his afflictions could not render him less than happy. He leaned his head against the rock and looked up at the floating clouds.

"I don't remember, Moses," he went on, "that I ever saw the sky look pootier than it does now. Ef that shade o' blue can be beat, or more del'kit-fashioned clouds be found, I dunno whar you'd find 'em. Thar is a Ruler o' 'arth an' heaven, dog, that knows how ter do all sorts o' great an' wonderful things. He brought me through my sickness, and I consait He has got a watchful eye on me, now. He don't desert the humblest o' His creetur's, as long as they desarve protectin' care. I don't understand the set forms, an' rules, an' by-laws o' fashionable Christians, but I consait the good Lord won't forgit me in the future any more than He has in the past. I expect we'll git out o' this fix somehow, Moses."

A growl broke from the dog's lips, while at the same moment Yank suddenly turned his head.

Both had heard a new sound up the winding gulch.

"That sounded a good 'eal like a human voice!"

He listened attentively but could hear nothing. Moses, however, arose to his feet and, sniffing the air uneasily, growled again.

"What d'ye scent, dog?" asked the dog's master. "Don't tell me it's a foe, fur I couldn't fight a baby."

Perhaps two minutes passed; then the voice sounded again, this time very near, and a powerful baritone voice sent forth the words and music of a song with force which made the echoes ring, and with such distinctness that it was plain the unseen vocalist must soon become visible.

There was a hearty good will about the effort, and though Yank's hand mechanically grasped his rifle, he did not untie it from the dog's back.

"Sounds like a reg'lar band!" the veteran exclaimed.

There was certainly a good deal both of sound and of melody, but only one person was singing. He was doing zealous work, and each word at last became audible to the wounded rover.

"The West, the West, the boundless West!—
It is the land for men of sand!
Here Nature greets each happy guest,
And grants the object of his quest;
Here he may seek with eager zest
The daring sports that he loves best,
While pleasures grand on every hand
Adorn the Paradise out West!
It is the land for men of sand—
The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

The last word of the song died away, and then around a point of rock came the singer. The first glance showed him to be a man of muscle, of rude attire and anything but subdued manner, but Yank still refrained from securing his rifle. The voice had made an impression upon him, and as the man came nearer, his face in-

creased it. He was young in point of years, and the mountaineer's quick eyes marked his countenance as that of an honest man.

Evidently the unknown did not expect to meet any one, for he had advanced within twenty feet when he saw the pair by the rock.

The discovery, when made, brought him to a sudden halt.

He stared for a moment in complete surprise, and then plucked off his big hat.

"Hallo, general!" he exclaimed, heartily.

"Hallo, neighbor!" was the ready reply.

"Taking your post-prandial siesta?"

"I'm settin' down ter rest, but ef my senses don't deceive me, it's a rock, not a post, I'm settin' against," Yank answered, practically. "As fur the rest o' your remark, it's all Choctaw, an' wu's, ter me."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed the new-comer. "I see you hit for the head of the nail. What in creation is that dog doing with the rifle?"

"He's carryin' what his master is too weak ter carry."

The unknown's face had been full of high good humor, but it suddenly became grave.

"You'll excuse me, general," he exclaimed. "Now I look at you, you do look broken up. What's the disturbance?"

"Only four or five bowie-slashes."

The stranger cast down his big hat forcibly.

"Wounded?" he cried. "Zounds! and am I standing here like a dumb Colossus of Rhodes while you need attention? Perish the thought! Where are your wounds? Show me the—"

"Wait a bit," interrupted the mountaineer. "Ef you don't objeck I'd like ter caterkise ye a bit."

"Wade right in, general!" heartily responded the stranger.

"Whar be I?"

"On Catback Ridge."

"The condemn'd cat has got its back up a good 'eal, ain't it?" asked Nevermiss, with quaint humor.

"Ha! ha! ha!" roared his new acquaintance. "That is well put, by George!"

"Is any town nigh?"

"Not over half a mile distant."

"Land o' Goshen! that's the best news I've heerd fur some time. Do you live thar?"

"Well, yes, just at present."

"What's yer name, stranger?"

"Sam Perkins, otherwise known as Paradise Sam."

"That's a good, hearty name."

"I'm considerable hearty, myself, general."

His appearance confirmed his assertion. He was not above the average bight, but he had a solid, compact, well-rounded figure, and unquestionably possessed great strength. His whole attire was the plain and simple garb of the West, and he wore it with careless grace. His hair was of a moderately light-shaded brown, and was cut quite close. He wore a heavy mustache, but was otherwise closely shaven.

There was much to be discovered in his face. It was broad and well-formed, and he would have been called a fairly good-looking man, but the most noticeable thing to be seen was the unmistakable evidence of great good humor and high spirits. The way in which he had roared out his wild song, and his subsequent hearty manner, only seemed in keeping with the gay, jovial look of his whole face.

A physiognomist would have said of him: "Here is a man of unfailing good humor; of boisterous good humor; of hearty, natural, contagious good humor. His nature is like a day of sunshine. He is one to be trusted, for he has the amiable impulses of a child in its best-humored moments, mixed with the shrewdness of an intelligent man."

Yank Yellowbird looked at him with increasing confidence.

"Paradise Sam!" he repeated. "That's a right good name. What might be your business?"

"I'm a guide and hunter, but when I turn my gigantic brain to chasing the slippery, but delightful dollar, I'm principally a guide. Somebody plastered the minor sobriquet of 'The Top-Notch Pilot' onto me, because I pilot parties of my fellow-beings through and along the top-notches of the Nor'west mountains. D'ye ketch the idea, general?"

"To be sure—sartain. Wal, Sam'l, you see before you a man that has done some trampin' hisself in his day; though his legs has about giv'n out now, owing ter a skeercity o' sarculatin' blood. My legs must hav blood ter keep up their muskle. I knowed one man who didn't use none, but his legs had been shot off in a quarrel durin' the war-time. A cannon-ball did it, an' the man never give his consent. That ain't ter the p'int, though. You see afore ye, Sam'l, an old trumper o' the hills who is egregiously used up. Kin I hire you ter help me toddle along ter the village you speak on?"

CHAPTER VII. THE WOUNDED MAN FINDS FRIENDS.

PARADISE SAM answered promptly and heartily:

"Nothing will please me more, general. I've been in bad scrapes myself, and it's mighty pleasant to get a friendly lift when you're on

the wrong side of the fence, and your muscle is out of trim."

"Thank ye, Sam'l, thank ye. By the way," Yank added, "I notice you call me 'genral.' May I ask ef I have a military 'pearance?"

"Can't say you do, just now. You look more like a subject for a hospital. It's a habit of mine to use the word 'general' in direct address."

"To be sure. I didn't s'pect I looked like a sojer, though thar have been some in my fam'ly. My gran'father was in that business, but he never got rich at it. When the war eended he got the tick-tacks o' war, an old blanket, a saber wound in the calf o' his west leg an' an atrocious bad case o' rheumatics, fur his share o' the plunder. He had an idee I'd make a sojer, my gran'father had; an' he posted me up on the tick-tacks, but I didn't like the idee o' prancin' 'round 'mongst bullets an' bagonets."

"Sech bein' the case I was 'prenticed ter a dry-goods man an' put behind the counter as a clerk. Stayed thar two weeks, an' then he discharged me fur not waitin' on the customers better; said I kept them waitin', an' wa'n't faithful ter business, an' all that sort o' thing. My parients felt mortal bad, an' they put me ter work in a dentist's office. I s'pose I'd been thar now only fur one little sarcumstance out o' the common run."

"My second day at the office I got thar bright an' 'arly, but my boss was still absent when I got swept up. Somebody else come, though, fur in stomped a lank, wild-lookin' man, with both han's held ter his face.

"Whar's the dentist?" sez he.

"He ain't come yit," sez I.

"Who be you?" sez be.

"I'm the assistant," sez I, proud as you please.

"Then take right hold an' jerk out this tooth," sez he. "I ain't slept none fur a week," sez he, "an' I'll be consarned ef I stand it any longer. It hurts like hurley," sez he, fairly dancin' with pain, "an' I'm 'most crazy. Go right at me, quick; don't keep me waitin'; an' with that he flopped inter the chair.

"I declar', it 'most took my breath away, fur I'd no more idee o' the correck way ter pull a tooth than I had o' talkin' Hottentot, fur my 'sperience so fur in the office had been confined ter sweepin' the floor. I never would 'a' te'ched him, nohow, but I remembered the drygoods man had discharged me fur not properly waitin' on customers, an' fur keepin' them waitin'; an' 'twouldn't never do ter let hist'ry repeat itself. The famly pedigree was at stake, an' I made up my mind that egregious tooth was comin' out.

"Wal, I gripped holt o' the thingum jig the dentist used in sech cases; parsips, I b'lieve he called 'em—no, it was biceps, I reckon."

"Forceps," suggested Paradise Sam.

"Bleeged to ye; I knowed 'twas suthin' o' the sort. Wal, I took the instrument an' laid hold o' the tooth. The man was scared, an' so was I. Prob'y he felt the pain wuss, but I suffered like hurley. I braced my feet ag'in' his chair an' begun ter pull, an' he begun ter holler. That made me all the more detarmined, an' I bung on like the mischief, but he didn't do his part. He grabbed my hand an' jumped out o' the chair, but, though I didn't git ahead much, my pride ariz, an' I allowed I wa'n't goin' ter be beat by no egregious little ivory like that.

"The man kept hollerin', an' he grappled with me, but I tripped him, an' then at it we went on the floor. I tell ye, Sam'l, things was pooty lively thar fur a while. We rolled six or eight times all over the office, fu'st him on top an' then me; an' we knocked over the furnitoor, an' got mor al dusty; but my spunk was up, an' I never let go until that tooth come out with a crack like a whip.

"Ef ever man 'arned his money I did, but, ef you'll b'lieve it, the patient was mad as a hatter. He 'lowed I'd most murdered him, an' wanted ter lick me, but finally went off in a buffy mood. I'd forgot ter c'leck pay, so I didn't tell the dentist 'bout it; but next day the patient brung suit for five thousand dollars damage fur barbarous practice, as they called it. He didn't git a cent, 'cause my marster hadn't no money, but I became the objick o' much antipathy an' derision, an' I lit right out fur the West. I never hev pulled a tooth sence."

Paradise Sam had listened with the closest attention, his broad face full of interest and eagerness, and at the close he broke into a boisterous laugh.

"Ha, ha, ha!" he roared. "That was a great case, general. Bless your heart, I can imagine you waltzing the fellow over the office! Lively time, wasn't it? Wish I'd been there, though not as a patient. Ha, ha, ha!"

The mountaineer's gray eyes twinkled. He liked to have his stories appreciated, and Sam seemed inclined to pay unusual respect and attention.

"I've had a good 'eal o' exper'ence in my day," Nevermiss gravely added.

"I don't doubt it in the least. By the way, I haven't heard your name yet."

"It's Yank Yellowbird."

"I thought so."

"You did!"

"Yes."

"How's that?"

"I was looking for you."

"Lookin' fur me?" echoed Yank, in genuine surprise.

"I was, by George! Somebody sent me."

"Who?"

"A pretty little brown-haired woman."

"Land o' Goshen! it can't be her name was Mollie Dixon?"

"That's just what it was."

"Is she nigh here?" asked the mountaineer, eagerly.

"She's at Good Luck."

"Whar's that?"

"Just beyond the gulch. It's the town of which I told you."

"Land o' Goshen! is that so? An' Mollie is thar! Sam'l, I'll take your arm, ef you please. I've be'n about all carved up by atrocious insex, an' I'm weak as a miserable old rat, but thar's lots o' life left in me yit."

He tried to rise alone, but Paradise Sam stopped him.

"Steady, general, steady! Let me give you a lift. You don't want to overdo this job. I'll have you at Good Luck in short order, but you want to arrive in good shape."

His strong arms were put to good use, and he lifted Yank easily, yet with singular gentleness. Good news had given the veteran fresh strength and he stood quite erect. Moses, who had been looking at the Top-Notch Pilot with interest quite unusual to his grim, dignified nature, vibrated his tail briskly, to show his approval of the new order of things.

The journey was begun.

"So Mollie really sent you ter look fur me?" asked Yank, whose mind seemed to run in one channel.

"She did, by George!"

"How'd she know whar I was?"

"She didn't know, general, and that was what bothered me. I've been on the search four days, but it was all haphazard. You were marked down in her books as missing, and she feared there had been foul play, but not a clew had we to your whereabouts."

"She was interested, though?"

"General," cried the Pilot, with enthusiasm, "if she was as much interested in me, I should be the happiest man in these parts!"

Nevermiss chuckled with pleasure.

"Have you known her long, Sam'l?"

"A whole week."

"She's a mortal pooty little woman."

"General, she's an angel!"

Paradise Sam spoke with loud enthusiasm, but his sincerity was beyond question.

"I shall be glad ter see her ag'in."

"So shall I, general. I haven't seen her for three whole hours, and I must say I'm lonesome. My only consolation is in thinking of her, and when I do think of her, it puts me in royal good humor. I feel like singing, and if you don't mind, I will."

"And pleasures grand on every hand

Adorn the Paradise out West;

It is the land for men of sand—

The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

The deep-chested young Pilot roared out the song with power which was amazing, but as he reached the end something happened which brought both men to a sudden stop. Another voice arose in song—this time a woman's voice, clear, rich and musical—and Sam's own words were sent back to him as melodiously, if not with such volume, as before.

"Mollie, by my life!" exclaimed Perkins, and then he raised his voice and uttered a ringing shout.

A moment more and the second singer appeared. Springing from behind a rock she waved her hand and faced them with a bright, arch, mischievous smile, but it suddenly faded as she saw that Sam was not alone.

Brief was her hesitation, and then she hurried toward the men. Sam Perkins was forgotten, and she grasped Yank's hands warmly.

"Thank heaven you are back!" she exclaimed. "You don't know how glad I am!"

"Be you, ree'lly? Little woman, you delight my heart."

"But you are sick—"

"Only an artom; only an artom, child. I've had an egregiously voy'lent attack o' newrolgy, an' it wa'n't so much newrolgy as cold steel, neither; but don't ye worry 'bout me. I shall pull out all right. The Yellowbirds beat the mischief fur gittin' out o' tribulations an' distresses. They git floored now an' then, but they won't stay floored, nohow, an' that's all there is to it."

"You met those men."

"I consait I did."

"Did they wound you?"

"Mollie, I admit they carved me up like pison, but them who carved me never lived ter know the parti'clars o' the affair. I got pooty badly used, but I wouldn't swap places with 'em, nohow. Le's set down an' have a talk. Thar are some things I want ter know the wu'st way, an' thar are other things I kin tell; while as fur standin' up, my legs ain't got the starch in 'em nec'sary fur the work. I need a good 'eal o' rest fur one o' my size."

CHAPTER VIII.

A BLACK MARK TO ROCHESTER'S CREDIT.

THE trio sat down together. This time there were two pairs of strong young arms to assist Yank, and he accepted their aid with an appearance of great satisfaction. He was painfully weak for one of his former strength, but his face expressed great contentment and happiness. He was with two young persons to whom he had taken a great liking, and bodily infirmities could not curb his humorous fancy.

"This sarcumstance," quoth he, leveling his index finger at Mollie, "reminds me of an episode in the life o' my late lamented ancestor, Moses Yellowbird. You may have heerd o' him. He got lost when a baby, an' strayed inter the bullrushes, an' bad a mortal bad time, but was finally found by a pooty gal an' saved. It's the same with me. I'm weak an' helpless ef I be big, but the Yellowbird luck ain't gone back on me. I feel pooty cheerful in my mind."

"Bless you, general, we'll look out for you now!" declared Paradise Sam heartily.

"Indeed, we will!" added Mollie quickly.

"Young folks, I thank ye—I thank ye oncommon bearty. Now fur our stories—but would ye mind onstrappin' that rifle from the dog? I consait he don't feel at ease with the thing on his back, though I've carried it many and many a mile. I've had adventures without number in my day, an' that rifle has figgered in 'em all. Ask any o' my old partners—Ben Buckingham, Border Bullet, Central Pacific Paul, Kansas Kitten an' the others."

By this time Mollie had relieved Moses of his load. The dog recognized her readily, and not only showed his pleasure at being transformed from a pack-animal, but rubbed his cold nose against her hand in a friendly way.

"I should be a defunct Yellowbird if it wa'n't fur that dog," assented Yank, regarding his four-footed friend with great good-will. "I'll tell ye about it."

He explained how he had followed the stage, fallen into the ambush and been attacked, and how he had fainted from loss of blood.

"When I come to," he resumed, "thar I laid right in the trail, an' thar was the three assassins, still an' dead. I was pooty nigh as bad off myself, fur I admit I was most egregious weak. Thar was the bullet-wound on my head, which had dazed me an' made me onfit fur the fight; an' thar was three knife-cuts, one in my left arm an' two in my side. One o' the last was deep an' bad, an' blood had flowed out o' me like water. I ain't be'n so cut up sence ten year ago when the Sioux Injuns pooty nigh got the best on me."

"When I come to, Moses was lappin' my face an' han's all over with his great, big tongue. He was worried like the mischief, the dog was; an' I must say his affection was touchin' in the extreme. He was right pleased when I come to, but thar wa'n't much about me ter be proud on. I's so weak I couldn't stand."

"I ain't goin' ter make this account long now, but tell it as quick as I can. Ter cut it short, I laid right in the trail all that night, an' part o' the next day, with the atrocious insex who'd tried ter kill me fur neighbors, an' Moses fur a guard. I thought some humans would come along, but they didn't, an' when, 'bout noon the next day, I seen we was goin' ter have a big shower, I sot out for kiver. I's still onable ter stand, an' I dragged my poor, cut-up body along over the ground, inch by inch, while the dog watched me with an expression o' the most pathetic misery I hardly ever seen."

"Finally I got ter a little recess under a big, overhangin' rock, an' thar I laid down. Crawlin' had 'bout used me up, an' I wa'n't over-an'-above sure but my last day had come. Arter a bit I summoned strength ter bind up my hurts the best I could, an' then I laid back an' went ter sleep.

"I laid in that little cave twelve days. It was dry, an' the weather was jest about comfortable, an' I had no trouble on that score. Mebbe you wonder what I lived on. Wal, I had two days' pervisions fur a wal man with me, an' that amount will go some ways with a sick man; but I had other means o' supply. Do ye see Moses? Do ye see the four cardinal p'ints o' his big brown eyes turned onter me?"

The mountaineer's voice faltered, and he reached out his hand to his shaggy friend.

Moses kissed the friendly hand in dog fashion, and then rested his head upon his master's knee and again turned the regard of his great eyes upon the face of the man he loved so well.

"Hyar is a friend," Neverriss added, "who is as true as steel. He's follered me in good luck an' bad; he's shared my plenty an' my poverty; an' more nor once he's helped me amazin' when danger was abroad. This time he saved my life!"

"Noble Moses!" murmured Mollie, caressing the animal's head.

"Like master, like dog!" was Sam's terse tribute.

"I said he saved my life, an' so he did. He ketched game an' brought me; he brought dry wood fur my fire; an' he watched over me day an' night. I didn't worry as I laid thar, fur I

had a good friend, an' I knewed that ef the Master o' Life thought good fur me ter git well, Moses would help me through. I wa'n't quite helpless. Thar was a spring o' water a few feet away, an' I could get ter that. I could keep my fire goin' too, an' cook my food; but only fur Moses, I'd had no wood ter burn an' no game ter cook. I say he saved my life, an' so he did."

"For awhile my chances didn't look to be o' the best, for the cut in my side was egregious deep, but I finally began ter mend. Land o' Goshen! wa'n't it slow work! Ef you ever noticed a doctor weigh out some strong drug whar an' artom the size o' a pin-head counts, you kin imagine 'bout how much strength I gained each day."

"Hows'er the Yellowbirds are a mortal hard lot ter put down, an' I finally got onter my feet ag'in. I knewed I must git ter some settlement, an' I started; an' a more tickeler dog than Moses was when he seen I was able ter move you never set eyes on. He capered 'round an' barked like hurley, an' all his dignity was throwed away fur the time bein'."

"I tried ter take the trail ag'in, but made some miscalculation—I wa'n't myself, nohow—an' I wandered sort o' hap-hazard the fu'st day. Sence that I've studied the heavens an' held ter a direck course, but I'd no idee whar I was, nor whar I'd come out, until I run onter Sam'l here."

"Providence directed your steps toward the village I had previously told you I would stop at!" exclaimed Mollie.

"I consait you're right, little woman, an' that same Providence won't never forsake none ov us."

Moses rubbed his head against his master's hand, and the mountaineer added with emphasis:

"Nor I don't b'lieve good an' faithful dogs will be forgot, neither!"

"They're honest as the day is long," Paradise Sam agreed. "It would be a better world if men averaged as well."

"You're right, Sam'l; you be, by hurley!" Yank exclaimed, fervently. "But this ain't ter the p'int. Mollie, I'm all in a fever ter bear your story. What about yourself, Starvation City an' the Rochesters?"

"Of Starvation City I only know that I have left it. I've heard that it was named because its first settler had such a passion for gold that, to dig it, he neglected all precautions, was caught in winter snows and starved among his nuggets and yellow dust. That's the nature of those now there, and I am glad to say I have left them forever."

"As for Ames Rochester, he did not go to Duffy's Drift, after all. He turned and took the trail to Lame Horse Run, and there the Starvation City stage left him, as there was good accommodation beyond. Something caused him to change his mind, and Zoe's remains were buried at Lame Horse.

"Ames Rochester and Madame Granville then left the town for the South, and so they seem to have faded forever from our knowledge and our view."

Mollie ceased speaking, and there were several moments of silence while Yank slowly stroked his beard.

"Some things are mortal strange!" he finally observed.

"What do you mean?"

"Rochester seems to have changed his mind several times arter leavin' Starvation City. He was goin' ter go ter Duffy's Drift, but he didn't. He was goin' ter take his sister's remains South, but he didn't."

"It does seem strange, don't it, mountaineer?"

"It does, by hurley! Now, thar is one thing I've kep' back in my story. Things was pooty animated while I was fightin' the three men in the gulch, but I recognized them!"

"You did?"

"To be sure."

"Who were they?"

"Can't state their names, but they were men I seen at Starvation City an' tried ter enlist ag'in Rochester!"

"That is strange!"

"It seems so at fu'st glance, but I didn't fail ter study it out while I laid under the rock as aforeid. I argued like this: These men tol' Rochester I was workin' ag'in him, an' he spected right off that I might foller him. Them three men was sent on durin' the night, ahead o' the stage, ter ambush me ef I follered. They did it, too, but I'll leave it ter you ter say who got the best on't."

"By George, general!" cried Sam Perkins, "you have no cause to envy them. Say, Yank, I would have given ten dollars to see that fight! Considering you were half-stunned by the first shot, you did most remarkable work."

"Moses was there. I could never whipped 'em alone."

"By the way, what became of their bodies?"

"Prob'lly some o' their chums found an' cared fur them. Ef that was it, it was wal fur me thar war no trailer in the party. I thought o' this as I laid under the rock, an' expected ter see more atrocious insex appear, but they didn't come."

"This attack on you gives further proof of a deep, villainous plot on the part of Ames Rochester. If he was not engaged in some rascally performance, why should he object to having you follow him?"

"Wal put, Sam'l; wal put!"

"Say, general, I'm in this case by chance," added Sam, more earnestly. "I'm a happy-go-lucky rover, now taking a job as guide and, anon, scorning to let my services out. I went to the town of Good Luck by chance; I met Miss Dixon there by chance. Said she: 'I expected to meet Yank Yellowbird here; he hasn't come; I'm afraid harm has come to him; anyhow, he's missing.' Said I, 'By George, Miss Dixon, I'll find him!'"

"And he hunted every day, faithfully," interrupted Mollie.

"Without much result. However, I'm in the game now, and if friend Yellowbird don't object, I'd like to pull in double harness with him. I take it, general, you need another fortnight to put you on your feet. Well, while Mollie is playing nurse to you I'll be scouting around to Starvation City, Duffy's Drift, Lame Horse Run, et al., and by the time you're well again, I'll try to lay before you all the facts of the case to be obtained in this section. Then, if you say the word, we will join hands and go for Rochester and the Frenchwoman."

"Will you jine the crusade, ree'lly, Sam'l?" asked Yank, quickly.

"I will, by George!"

"And I, too!" declared Mollie.

Nevermiss extended a hand to each.

"That settles it!" he asserted, with an air of great satisfaction. "I've had a good many partners, but never any ter beat you two, I do b'lieve. We shall make a most remarkable trio, an' with Moses to help us, I consait we'll keep up the fam'ly pedigree in great shape. I wish my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, an' my female cousin, the poetess, was hyar ter jine us. Land o' Goshen! what a team we should make, then!"

CHAPTER IX.

SOMETHING STARTLES MOLLIE.

A WAGON-TRAIN was moving across a prairie as fast as the jaded horses could take it without exhausting their remaining vitality. Men, women and children were in the party, and at first glance they might have been thought a band of emigrants searching a new remote home; but a study of their faces would have dispelled this possible theory.

There was visible an anxious, frightened expression, which no emigrants, looking hopefully forward to the future, would have borne.

They were not emigrants—they were fugitives.

Once more the Sioux Indians, who, it was generally believed, had been reduced to a permanently peaceful state, had risen against the white settlers with murder in their hearts, and rifles and knives in their hands, and such whites as lived at remote points were fleeing to the larger settlements.

This particular party had at first numbered only six, all told, but subsequent additions had increased their number to twenty-three, of which eleven were men.

Noon was near at hand, and a halt was soon to be made. No one would have consulted the fatigue of the human portion of the caravan, but the horses had been so persistently urged that only due care would prevent a complete break-down. Not until they were nearer a point of safety must they risk losing the animals.

Their way was across a fairly level prairie, which was marked, but not obstructed, by numerous belts and groups of trees. On the south a long, low mountain chain extended parallel with their course; to the north was the still wilder country, which stretched away toward the home of the hostile Sioux.

Of the eleven men now belonging to the party, only seven were present. Four had gone ahead as scouts.

When a favorable point was reached the appointed leader, a man named Harker Drake, ordered a halt. The party paused in a timber-belt. Drake ordered dinner prepared, and then went to one side, and stood looking away over the prairie.

A second man approached him.

"I'd like ter say a word or two with ye, ef you don't objeck," was the quiet remark.

"Say it, then," was the surly reply.

"Do you know the country ahead o' us?"

Drake hesitated for a moment.

"No," he finally admitted.

"I do."

"What of it?"

It was a curt, insolent question, but the second man's voice did not betray the least resentment or coldness as he answered:

"Thar are valerale lives in our party—a good dozen women an' children. I'd hate like hurley ter see them come ter grief, but I'mafeerd they will, ef you take 'em along that course you've marked out."

"Which way would you have them go—north?"

"Not onless they want ter visit the Sioux. I

wouldn't have 'em go any way—leastways, not fur. I'd have 'em go ter the south mountains, an' stay ontill this Injun tribulation blows over."

"Hide in a cave, for instance?"

"Ef one could be found."

"And wait until all the Sioux were gathered here, and every foot of land a bidding-place for them?" sneered Harker Drake.

"Can they be any thicker than they be now?"

"How many have you seen?"

"I've see'd signs. I've passed thirty years o' my life on the prairies an' among the mountains, an' I've fit the Sioux, Comanche, Apache an' other Injuns. It ain't conceited in me ter say I know their ways right wal, an' know Injun sign when I see them. They are all around us now, thick as bees, an' whar signs be, thar the Injuns must be. I tell you fair, as an old Injun-fighter, that you run great risk by pushin' in ahead. I know the country thar, an' it's good land fur Injuns. It would be a heap safer ter take to the hills—it ree'lly would, neighbor."

Harker Drake had listened with impatience and anger.

"You've had your say, Yank Yellowbird," he retorted; "now hear mine. I'm leader of this train, and I allow dictation from no man. Those who don't like my way can go elsewhere!"

"I only spoke fur the good o' the women," was the quiet, pacific reply.

"You spoke to injure me," declared Drake, thumping his rifle upon the ground.

"You are mistaken, neighbor," calmly answered the mountaineer.

"Ever since you recognized me, you have been down upon me. You say I was once a member of Garrett Jeffreys's band of train-wreckers. What of it? That was long ago, and I have reformed; I am now as honest a man as you are, but you won't let me stay so—"

"You do me egregious wrong, Drake—"

"No, I don't! The moment you joined this train you aspired to be its leader. You always did want to be boss of every one and everything; and you wanted to rule here. You've been against me from the first, and your last advice is some trap for my feet. It won't work, Yank Yellowbird."

Drake spoke with angry vehemence, and there was a temporary sparkle of anger in Yank's eyes. It soon passed, however; he governed his temper admirably, and his voice remained as even as ever.

"It would be a mean man, Drake, who would let any mean little pussonal motive influence him when the lives o' women an' children are at stake. I'm not guilty o' what you charge. I ain't told your followers about your old career, an' I don't intend to. As fur our rowt, I only advise what I think is best."

"Your advice ain't wanted. If you're not satisfied, take your party and get out!"

"All right, Drake."

Answering without the least perceptible resentment, Yank turned and went away. He walked directly to where two persons stood together.

They were Mollie Dixon and Paradise Sam.

"What luck?" asked the Pilot, quickly.

"None!"

"Can't you convince Drake?"

"No more nor you could a mule," answered the mountaineer, ungraciously. "Ef sarcumstances was different, I consait I might find a way ter convince him. He used me mortal mean, Drake did: an' showed that he was jest as big an atrocious insex as ever; an' I consait I might 'a' let my dander rise, an' thrashed him like hurley, ef we'd b'en alone. I thought o' all the women an' children, though, an' not a rash word passed my lips. I's as meek as Job Yellowbird when he had his diffiklity with voy'lent b'iles."

"Drake won't go to the hills, eh?" demanded Sam.

"No."

"Is he blind?"

"Land o' Goshen! he don't know an Injun sign from a crow's-nest; an' he's so so soot in his way he wouldn't hear ter Daniel Boone, ef he was alive."

"The fellow will get a sick lesson."

Yank shook his head gravely.

"I'm willin' ter leave him in his folly, but my mind ain't easy as ter the females."

"Suppose we start a revolt?"

"No use. Everybody but us three—an', posserbly, Moses—b'lieves fully in Drake. It would be waste of words ter speak ter them."

"The Sioux will make their arguments convincing."

Sam spoke sharply, in strong contrast to his usual good humor, but immediately glanced at Mollie and added:

"I should smile to see them convince us, though!"

"You are kind," quickly returned the girl, "but you need not keep back any part of the truth for my sake. If you are brave enough to fight, surely I ought to be brave enough to believe you can take care of me. Don't fear for me, gentlemen!"

"Brave as ever, by hurley!" Yank exclaimed. "Sam'l, this little woman is a ree'l border heroine."

"She is, by George!" the Pilot declared.

And how had this trio happened to be in the company of the fugitives?

Paradise Sam's plan had been carried out in full. Yank was helped to Good Luck by his young friends, and Mollie became his constant attendant when he was awake. Really, the dangerous part of his illness was past, but her bright face did more than medicine could to guide him along the road to recovery.

Day by day he gained strength. After a little while he began to walk out with Mollie and the dog for his companions. They explored the adjacent hills, and Yank gained very perceptibly. Color returned to his face, flesh to his limbs and strength to every member. His form recovered its old uprightness, and the rifle which he could once hardly lift became again the reliable companion of his wanderings.

He could never forget those long walks, for the sunshine of Mollie's presence made his heart glad, and her own cheerfulness brought out fully the dry humor and whimsical conceits of his genial nature.

At the end of ten days he was wonderfully improved, and when another week had been added, he announced himself fully well.

In the meanwhile Paradise Sam had been at work. Being unknown at Starvation City he went there freely. He learned that three of their number had lately been shot in a way so "mysterious" that he could not get particulars, but he was satisfied that all of Yank's theories were correct—that Rochester had hired them to ambush Yank, and they had lost their evil, worthless lives in trying.

As to Rochester and Madame Granville, he was told that they had seen Zoe's remains consigned to the earth, and had then gone southeast. He followed after. He traced them some distance; then lost all track. He had, however, learned that their movements were so strange as to arouse fresh suspicion, and when he made his report to Yank, it had resulted in the three—Yank, Sam and Mollie—taking the eastward trail.

Satisfied that a crime had been committed they determined to find the guilty parties and bring them up to answer to the law, not in Starvation City, but where law and justice were more than a mockery.

This plan did not work surprisingly well. The trio became involved in the general flight of the white settlers from the edge of the Indian country, and at last they became members of the party led by Harker Drake.

This explains their presence in such an unexpected scene.

While they still stood in conversation they saw the men who have been mentioned as absent on a scout, returning to camp. More than this, they were accompanied by a man and two women; but there was nothing strange in this.

The party had been made up by just such additions along the trail.

Little attention was given the new-comers, and Yank proceeded to mention a matter he had been considering. There was strength in numbers, but he was so dissatisfied with their present course that he was of the opinion it would be better for them to separate from the large party at once and take to the hills.

He said as much and asked Paradise Sam's opinion. The reply was a prompt affirmative, and Nevermiss turned to Mollie.

"What do you say, little woman?" he asked.

But she did not answer. Instead, she met Yank's gaze with eager, startled eyes.

"Mountaineer," she cried, the man coming in with the scouts is no stranger—it is Ames Rochester.

CHAPTER X.

A MYSTERY WHICH DWARFS ALL OTHERS.

THIS surprising statement was hard to believe, and Yank and Sam were quite pardonable for not giving instant attention to the persons named. When they did look, the scouts and the new recruits had passed behind the point of trees and were temporarily invisible.

"I dunno as I understand ye right, Mollie," observed Nevermiss, doubtfully.

"I said that the man who has come in with the scouts was Ames Rochester," Mollie replied.

"Be you sure?"

"Yes."

"But how did he git hyar?"

"That I don't know."

"Of course ye don't; my question was a foolish one. Ames Rochester is this party! By hurley, this begins ter git excitin'! We've been huntin' for him, an' now he comes inter our claws when least expected. Wonder what in time got him mixed up with this Injun business, anyhow?"

This was a very timely question, for Rochester had not been expected there. The last heard of him and Madame Granville, he had announced that he was going to a town in Wyoming named Best Chance. The usual way of reaching it was by means of a semi-circular

route. Believing that Rochester would take such a course, Yank and his companions had tried to overtake him by a direct course across the wild country.

If Rochester was really with the fugitives, it appeared that he had adopted a similar line of travel.

"But the two women with him?" added Sam Perkins. "What about them? Was one Madame Granville?"

"I don't know," Mollie replied. "I had no suspicion that I should see any familiar faces here, and was not looking for one. Rochester was at the rear, and when I saw who he was, the women had passed the line of trees."

"They looked young," said Sam.

"Perhaps he and Madame Granville have another helpless girl in their clutches."

"We'll make it atrocious onpleasant fur them ef so!" Yank declared.

"It is not likely; but what about Rochester?"

The mountaineer stroked his beard, meditatively.

"Of course Rochester will keep along with the party, now he's jined us. Wal, ef thar was any way ter prevent his recognizin' you, we would jest lay low an' wait until we strike the settlements."

"That is out of the question; he will recognize me at once."

"Most likely."

"Look here," added Paradise Sam. "Won't the knave try to get up a feeling against us among our party, when he sees you and Mollie are here?"

"I was thinkin' of that," Yank admitted.

"If he goes to Harker Drake, he might make some considerable headway."

"The two atrocious insex would make a good pair. Wal, ef they jine hands, we must rely on the bonist men o' the party."

"Can we rely on them?"

"No," the mountaineer acknowledged.

"Seems to me we are in closequarters," Mollie remarked, somewhat anxiously.

"Don't ye be worried, little woman; don't ye be worried an artom. No matter what tribulations an' distresses come, nor how many mean critters rise ter threaten ye, b'ar in mind that Sam'l an' I are hyar."

"I couldn't have better defenders."

"We're loyal, anyhow, by George!" declared Sam.

"Loyal!" echoed Yank. "Why, we'd lay down our lives fur this little woman, Sam'l. Didn't she keer fur me when I's sick? Didn't she take me when I's weak as a child, an' put new life in me with her pooty face an' sunny smile an' cheerful words?"

"Were not your words just as cheerful?" quickly, brightly returned the girl.

"In a sartain clumsy way they may hev be'n, but don't ye try ter run yerself down. We know your tender heart an' true goodness too wal, don't we, Sam'l?"

"We do, by George!" declared the Pilot, striking his knee with his open hand.

The passage of time had brought about a remarkable understanding and state of good will between the strangely-assorted trio. Circumstances had made them associates, and taste had made them the best of friends. Dissimilar as they were in looks, they found a congeniality of mind that was surprising. That both men admired Mollie we have seen; that any honest person could help admiring Yank Yellowbird was simply impossible.

As for the veteran, he liked the young folks "egregiously," to use his own pet expression. They had the same happy, contented, sunshiny nature that he possessed, and they humored his conceits as no one else did. When he told his whimsical stories they always showed interest, and Sam's hearty, boisterous laugh pleased the narrator hugely.

After a few words the trio returned to camp. They had decided to watch Rochester, but not to make any attempt to set the other men against him unless he first gave signs of secret work.

If he went to Harker Drake with any false charge he would find ready sympathy, and any such movement must be headed off by a counter-move.

When they neared the camp it was thought best to separate, as their entrance would attract less notice. The new recruits must be settled down by that time, and a quiet return might be productive of good.

Yank had directed Mollie never to go outside the camp without a guard, and on this occasion he did not forget his usual care and caution. He directed the dog to accompany Mollie, and Moses obeyed with dignified pleasure.

Moses had surprised his master of late. Ever since he had been Yank's companion the animal had been noted for what Yank called "reserve"—a quality which nearly every one else termed "ugliness." The latter term was a libel; Moses was not ugly or vicious, and never had been; but he certainly was "reserved." He loved Nevermiss with all the warmth of his dog's heart; he was faithfulness in the extreme; he had followed his master through scores of dangers; he was brave as a lion; and never had he sullied his record by a vicious act.

Dignity, however, he did possess and maintain in the full sense of the word. He was not sociable with any other dog, when he met one, and he did not love the human race any more than he did the dog race. To his master's friends he was a dignified friend—nothing more.

With the arrival of Sam and Mollie there was a change in Moses's manner. He liked them from the first, and in a short time it became evident that they met with his approval fully, and bad won his affections. He ranked them second only to his master, and was especially proud when allowed to act as Mollie's escort.

On the present occasion he followed her with his usual dignified step as she made a slight detour in order to enter the camp in a quiet way.

Mollie was anxious, nevertheless, to gain a view of the new-comers and see who Rochester's companions were. That the male of the new trio was the sometime-schemer of the mining camp she was positive.

When she gained a point favorable for investigation, her gaze fell first upon several men standing in the center of the camp. Her assertion was confirmed—Ames Rochester was there, in conversation with Hooker Drake.

Where were the women?

Looking for them eagerly Mollie went on, and she was not long left in doubt.

A group of female fugitives revealed the new-comers among them, and Mollie was not surprised when she promptly discovered Madame Granville. There stood the Frenchwoman, looking just as she had done at Starvation City, and without the least sign of being beset with fear.

But where was the other woman who had come with Rochester and the Madame?

Mollie advanced nearer to the group, in order to distinguish her, and conversation became very audible. Madame Granville was talking with animation.

"Don't expect me to be afraid of ze Sioux!" she exclaimed. "I am from France, ze land of brave men and women. We have not ze fear zero of anys'ings. We are a race of warriors, men and women. Ah! ah! you should have seen ze women wiz ze muskets when zere was war! Afraid of ze Indians? *Mon Dieu!* no; I laugh at zem; zey are swine!"

"They're a kind of swine that take scalps!" returned a practical matron.

"Ah! ah! You would frighten ze weak, but I am strong."

"So are the Sioux."

"I defy zem; but mention zem not. My young friend is like you, wizze American blood; and we may make her weak."

Madame Granville faced the lady to whom she referred, but the clew was not necessary. Mollie had already gained a favorable position, and her gaze was upon the face of the woman who had come with the madame and Rochester.

The first glance made Mollie start with surprise, and then her face became the image of incredulous, amazed astonishment.

If Mollie had been superstitious she might have thought that she was looking upon a specter. She was not of that nature, and she was utterly dumfounded. She had recognized the second woman.

It was Zoe Rochester!

Yes, there in the prairie timber-belt, tall, erect and with every appearance of good health, stood the young lady Mollie had seen die, and a little later, placed in her coffin, at Starvation City.

Strange and startling fact!

Mollie's big gray eyes looked larger than ever as she tried to solve the mystery, but for a few moments she was utterly at fault. The dead do not return to life in this century, and the mystery was enough to make one's flesh creep.

What manner of a man was Ames Rochester that he could accomplish such wonders? Must Rochester's foes fight the powers of darkness, also?

CHAPTER XI.

TO BE PUT TO THE TEST.

MOLLIE's dazed condition quickly vanished. Having no faith in the supernatural she soon arrived at an explanation—she had been deceived by a resemblance, and the person was not Zoe Rochester, but some one who very much resembled her.

Half-smiling at what she was now ready to term her absurd fancy, she advanced toward the group to secure a still nearer view and prove her own error.

But as she did so the object of her regard spoke.

"I am not disposed to deny the existence of danger, or to defy it, but I trust that I shall not be found wanting in self-control when the hour of actual peril comes."

Another link in the chain! The voice was the voice of Zoe Rochester, or wonderfully like it, and the clearer view of the face only brought back all of Mollie's startled surprise.

Had she not herself seen Zoe die, she would almost have risked her own life on the assertion that Zoe stood before her, alive and well.

Could it be a mere resemblance? There was the same fine form; the same dark, rippling hair; the same deep, handsome eyes; the same delicate, refined face; the same voice and the

well-remembered motions. There was absolutely no difference except that on this face was the stamp of health; that there was more strength in the musical voice; and that the shrinking terror of old had given place to calm composure.

One of the men came hurrying up to say that they would move on at once, and the women turned and hurried toward the center of the camp in a body.

Mollie followed more moderately.

She found her horse waiting for her, held by Paradise Sam, but not a word was spoken until the party had started on. Then Yank rode to the girl's side.

"I've seen the critter, an' it is Ames Rochester," the veteran announced, in a low voice.

"I can tell you more than that," Mollie answered.

"What?"

"Do I look to be cut of my mind?"

"Not much, you don't!"

"I am afraid you will soon change your opinion. Mountaineer, one of the women with Rochester is Madame Granville; the other is—"

She paused, and Yank encouragingly asked:

"Who?"

"The girl I saw die at Starvation City!"

"Land o' Goshen! what's that?"

"She's Zoe Rochester!"

Nevermiss removed his old fur cap and slowly stirred up his flaxen hair with his long fingers.

I don't jestly understand," he acknowledged.

"Nor I. Far from it! I am terribly perplexed—more, I am terribly shocked. I saw Zoe consigned to her coffin, yet she is now in this party. Do you wonder that I asked you if I seemed to be out of my mind?"

"Show me the gal."

Mollie obeyed. Some of the fugitives were necessarily riding in the wagons, but Rochester's party, like themselves, had horses of their own. The mysterious girl was riding one of these animals with easy grace.

"She don't look like a ghost, by hurley!"

"Are you not deceived by a resemblance?" asked Paradise Sam.

"No!" Mollie replied firmly.

"Then the plot is deeper than we thought."

"That's it, Sam'l; that's it!" agreed the mountaineer. "The little woman, byar, said from the fu'st thar was some deep, mean plot. She was right. Ef Zoe is byar, thar is chicanery afoot. Ghosts don't toddle round in these days, though some o' the old-time Yellowbirds left written dockments tellin' o' egregious times they had with that sort o' critters. Seems that Zoe is alive an' wal, eh?"

"Rochester deceived you all, by George!" exclaimed Paradise Sam.

"It isn't possible," asserted Mollie.

"Why not?"

"I saw Zoe die."

"I've heard of folks being brought back to life. To put it more sensibly, the girl may have been in a drugged sleep, not dead."

"That's the way ter figger it!" said Yank, quickly, and with an emphatic nod.

"But I saw her die, and I felt of her pulse without detecting any pulsation," urged Mollie.

"I've heard of drugs," returned Sam, "which will suspend all the powers of existence and give an exact semblance of death—though I don't know what they are."

"Nor I—I'll be condemn'd ef I do!" Yank exclaimed.

"This is idle talk," interrupted Mollie. "Why do we waste words in idle conjecture when the object of our discussion is so near? I will ride forward and speak with her."

Nevermiss seemed to be on the point of refusing his consent, but he changed his mind.

"Be mortal careful about it, then," he directed. "an' don't git inter any tribulation. Delikit cases have ter be handled with great care. I know, 'cause I've had my share o' experience. Member right plain when I called on a doctor ter be treated fur the egregious newrolgy that was rackin' my system.

"Is it bad? sez the doctor.

"It's atrocious bad," sez I.

"Whar's the seat o' the diffikilty? sez he.

"It ain't got no seat," sez I; "it never sets down, at all. It keeps on its feet, an' goes trampin' all over me, an' it's got spikes in its shoes," sez I.

"I mean," sez the doctor, "whar's it mostly located?"

"In my body, arms, legs an' head," sez I. "Ef thar's any part on't I don't possess, I'll sell the rest of the ache b'low cost to whoever has got the rest."

"Does the pain go in vibratory moves? sez he.

"It goes in rig'ments, battalions an' corpses," sez I; "an' it's mostly corpses. I'll be one pooty soon ef it don't let up," sez I.

"I reckon I'll blister ye," sez he. "I go a good 'eal on the blister system. I kin cure everything but whoopin'-cough with blisters," sez he, "an' in case o' that infirmary, I bandage the patient's mouth so the whoops can't git out. It's powerful effickshus for whoopin'-cough. So is blisters fur newrolgy," sez he, confident-like. "It always draws it out."

"Wal, at me he went. Jest then I's suffrin'

most with my knee, whar you could indistinctly hear me ache; so the fu'st blister went on thar. It was wily, the newrolgy was; an' it straight-way dodged inter my hip; but we slapped a blister on *thar*, an' the pain took ter my ankle. Ter make the story short we chased it jest as you hev see'd folks do in blind-man's buff—but we didn't ketch it. It run like hurley, an' our room fur operations finally give out. Thar wa'n't a squar' inch, nor an unsquar' inch, neither, fur that matter, but was blistered; but I'll be condemned ef the newrolgy wa'n't right in business, jest the same as ever.

"I'd got so mortal sore I didn't enjoy the hunt an artom, an' I finally tol' the doctor we'd give it up, an' I'd take the rest o' my money in medicine fur the blisters. I did it, too, an' a worrisome time I had on't. Them blisters was right up-an'-down painful, an' I tell ye ontill they was cured I reell'y enjoyed feelin' the newrolgy ache. I did, by burley!"

Nevermiss turned a very grave face toward Sam Perkins, but the latter had learned before that day that Yank's "newrolgy" was only a creation of his humorous fancy, and there was a merry twinkle in the Pilot's eyes.

"You've been a great sufferer, mountaineer," he declared.

"To be sure."

"It's a wonder you are so hale and hearty."

"'Tis the Yellowbird grit keeps me up. Nobody o' my pedigree was downed yit, though I've had some egregious narrer escapes."

Mollie had been watching for an opportunity to join the mysterious girl, and she now rode forward.

"Pooty as a peach, by hurley!" quoth Yank, looking after her.

"A true Western girl, and they beat the world," heartily replied Sam. "One department of my home-made song refers to them, and I'll give it."

Lowering his voice, he sung as follows:

"The Western girls, ho! ho! I sound
My loudest lays to sing their praise!
Though plain and simply they are dressed,
They are the girls that we like best;
No royal queen upon her throne
Can match the charms which are their own.
If I decide to take a bride,
I'll know just where to seek the best—
'Twould give me pride, if to my side,
I took a bride from out the West!"

"Bravo! bravo!" Yank exclaimed. "That was monstrous wal done. The only trouble was you couldn't raise yer voice fur up, but the words was mortal good!"

"Do you think so?" asked Sam, dubiously.

"Right good sentiment, an' wal sung."

There was no reply. They saw that Mollie had reached the side of the mysterious girl, and both were curious to see the result.

Mollie was beset with many queer emotions as she approached the other fair rider. The resemblance seemed as strong as ever, but what was she going to say if the girl denied her identity? Mollie had a vein of humor, and she imagined herself answering: "I thought you were a girl I saw die a month ago!"

Even this conceit did not put her at ease, but she summoned her bravest manner, and rode directly to the side of the object of her interest.

The latter turned her head; the two girls looked each other in the face; Mollie smiled, but on the part of her companion there was not the least sign of recognition.

"How do you do?" spoke Mollie, as a starter.

The girl smiled and bowed without any change of manner, but politely answered:

"I am quite well, thank you, but, as you can well understand, I am far from being at ease. I may lack bravery, but our present peril frightens me."

CHAPTER XII.

IS IT ZOE, OR ZOE'S DOUBLE?

THE fair speaker was kind and courteous; she was even inclined to be a trifle humorous; but her manner was as unconscious as though she had never before met Mollie or heard of her. Yet she was looking at the mountain girl with Zoe's eyes, and speaking with Zoe's voice.

That there could be a mistake seemed impossible, and Mollie grew vexed.

"Danger is common in the West," she observed.

"Just now—yes," returned the fair unknown, pleasantly.

"Have you never met danger before?"

"Not any serious danger."

"How about Starvation City?"

The unknown looked puzzled.

"About what?" she asked.

"I refer to your experience at Starvation City."

"I was never there; I do not even know where it is."

"Possibly your name is not Zoe?"

"It is not. My name is Estella Vance."

"And your companions over yonder—I suppose they are not Ames Rochester and Madame Granville?"

"Oh! but they are; those are their names. Are you acquainted with them?"

"Probably not. I thought I was, and I also thought I knew you, but now that you inform

me that I don't, it is quite likely that I never knew them. I must have learned their names by some species of divination, or something of that sort!"

Mollie spoke with sarcasm quite unusual to her, but her faith had not been shaken by the girl's denial. Every moment served to make her more confident, and as she remembered how faithfully and anxiously she had watched by the sick girl's couch, she could not avoid feeling angry.

The self-styled Estella Vance looked puzzled for a moment; then she smiled again and answered:

"Possibly I can explain what puzzles you. I once had a cousin named Zoe Rochester. She was Ames Rochester's sister; but she died a month or so ago, somewhere in Montana. I am said to resemble her greatly. If the Zoe you knew was a sister to Mr. Rochester, then that explains your mistake."

The statement was easily, frankly made, and Miss Vance looked into Mollie's eyes very unwaveringly. No form of the last word could have been applied to Mollie. She did waver. The explanation was so plausible, and the speaker's manner so frank, that no one could have wholly withheld it.

"Let me call my cousin," added Miss Vance. She motioned to Ames Rochester, and he came at once. He was about to address her when his gaze wandered to Mollie; then he stopped short and seemed greatly surprised.

"Bless me!" he exclaimed.

"Any one you know, Ames?" asked Miss Vance.

"Well, I should say so. Miss Dixon, how do you do? I am delighted to see you!"

He extended his hand. There are times in our lives when we are surprised into doing what we despise ourselves for doing a few seconds later. It was so with Mollie then. Rochester's cool assurance took her unawares, and her hand was in his grasp before she realized the fact. She withdrew it hastily.

"So you have left the mining-camp, Miss Dixon?" Rochester added.

"As you see."

"It's ho! for the East, is it?"

"I am done with Starvation City, anyway. The place has no pleasant memories. How is it with you?"

His face became very grave.

"You read my feelings correctly," was his solemn reply; "I look back to the camp with bitter grief. Poor Zoe! it was hard that she should go thus!"

"Very hard!" coincided Mollie, pointedly.

"She took a fancy to you."

"Was it permanent?" asked Mollie, with increasing significance.

"I do not understand."

"I was wondering if Zoe would still be grateful, if she was alive?"

"No doubt. It was not a part of her noble nature to forget any kindness. But allow me, Miss Dixon, to introduce my cousin, Miss Estella Vance."

He turned toward Zoe's double, and bowed to both girls very politely.

"Miss Dixon and I fell into conversation before you came, Ames," Miss Vance explained, easily.

"I noticed her resemblance to Zoe. It is very remarkable!"

It would seem that no innocent person could fail to notice and comment upon Mollie's emphasis, but these persons passed it by.

"Everybody notices it," answered Rochester.

"I could almost believe Zoe had risen from her grave," Mollie persisted.

"Poor Zoe! My life is a blank without her."

"I should think Miss Vance could fill her place."

"A most charming cousin is Estella, but she is not Zoe."

"Is it possible?"

"Of course no one can fill a sister's place."

"Zoe was one of the best of sisters," remarked Miss Estella Vance. "I saw her last ten years ago, but we all know of her goodness. Her mother and mine were sisters, and very affectionate sisters, too. Now, only Ames and I remain. I suppose it was best for Zoe to go when she was called, but it is hard for me to believe it."

"I am just as hard to convince as you are."

Mollie spoke almost contemptuously. Plausible as was the explanation given by her companions, and friendly and easy as was their manner, she was no nearer believing them than ever. She did believe, though, that the sick girl of Starvation City and Estella Vance were one and the same person, and she was angry that they should imagine they could deceive her.

As she made the last curt, ungracious reply she looked back toward Yank and Sam Perkins and added:

"I will excuse myself now."

"We hope to see you again, Miss Dixon," responded Rochester, with unfailing coolness. "Your kindness in poor Zoe's lifetime will always make me think of you with gratitude, and now I would be glad to have you act as Estella's friend."

"Thanks!"

Mollie uttered the monosyllable dryly, and then checked her horse and let the others ride on alone. Yank Yellowbird and Paradise Sam came up at once.

"What luck, little woman?" asked the mountaineer.

"I'll tell you just what was said, on condition that I am not interrupted until through."

"Agreed."

Mollie was vexed, and the story lost nothing in the telling. Graphically given, the facts were soon known to the men. They had not found it easy to keep quiet, and Sam broke out explosively when chance was vouchsafed him.

"By George! this beats the record!" he cried.

"It's mortal odd!" Nevermiss admitted.

"It is more," added Mollie.

"How's that?"

The girl leaned forward in the saddle and slowly enunciated:

"It is criminal!"

"Land o' Goshen! be you sure?"

"If so, say the word and Mister Rochester shall ornament the next tree!" asserted Perkins.

"Softly, my rash lieutenant!" continued Mollie. "Let us be calm and cool. Our enemies are in that mood; we must meet them on our own grounds."

"To be sure," said Yank, with a nod. "Ef thar is any cunnin' nec'sary, jest let us know it. The Yellowbirds always was great on long-headedness—all but me—an' I consait Sam'l don't git beat easy. But go on, gal!"

"Do you remember that the girl was riding alone when I joined her, with Rochester and the Frenchwoman several yards distant?"

"Yes."

"That was a trap."

"Fur whom?"

"For me. Knowing that I would want to speak with her, the three put their heads together and arranged it in a way best calculated to invite me on. In other words they left her alone, and I ran right into the trap."

"But what was the object?" demanded Sam.

"They wanted to hoodwink me as long as possible. Probably they didn't suspect my presence here when they joined the party, but they soon discovered me. They feared me. Plainly, it was to their interest to have me talk with the girl as soon as possible, for if it was possible to hoodwink me, it must be done before any notion I held became fixed in my mind by time and meditation."

"Argued like a lawyer!" exclaimed Yank.

"By hurley! you remind me o' my brother, Elihu Ebenezer Yellowbird, the persecutin' lawyer o' my home county. The way he'd talk was amazin', an' in a given time he could git tergether an' egregious lot o' facks, an' some on 'em was true, too."

"I infer they have not succeeded in convincing you, Miss Mollie," observed Sam Perkins.

"Decidedly, they have not!"

"What is your opinion of the girl?"

"I think she is Zoe Rochester."

"But, ou saw Zoe die."

"You and Yank Yellowbird have well pointed out that it is said to be possible to give a living person the semblance of death, by means of a drug of some sort, and then restore the person to life at will. I positively refuse to believe the cousin story. Zoe and Estella are one."

"But why all this upheaval and mystery?"

"The first time I ever talked with friend Nevermiss I told him that Ames Rochester had a deep, iniquitous plot in view. I say so now."

"You did tell me so, sartainly, little woman. A new question pops inter my mind, though. You tol' me at Starvation City that when Zoe lay there nigh death she seemed in great terror, an' ter look on them as her inemies. How is it now?"

"You have made a point, mountaineer, as I plainly see. Incongruous as it may seem, it is a fact that all the terror is gone from her manner; that she seems to regard them as her friends; and that she showed no gratitude to me. Not once did she waver, but despite this, I assert that she is the real and only Zoe Rochester!"

CHAPTER XIII.

YANK GOES ON A SCOUT.

THE fugitives continued their course as fast as their means would allow, but this was not in keeping with their wishes. Their horses had already been urged too much, and they could not now be forced to accomplish much without breaking them down.

In the mean while there was nothing to allay the fears of the fugitives. Every moment they expected to see the Sioux appear, and it was the general belief that their appearance meant destruction to the party.

There was some ground for the belief. In point of fact, Yank Yellowbird and Paradise Sam were the only men in the party versed in Indian warfare. Harker Drake and the others might be bold enough, but something more than bravery was needed to outwit the Indian warriors.

Hour after hour the party went on. Yank

did not once change his opinion that their wisest course was to take to the mountains, but he no longer tried to talk with Drake, and no argument arose.

Yank had an eye for what was going on within their lines, as well as beyond, but he saw nothing to confirm his suspicion that Drake might seek to turn the other fugitives against him.

Drake and Rochester rode together a good deal, but, suspicious as Yank was, he could not discover them looking toward him.

Rochester did not come near the mountaineer's party, nor did Mollie go to Estella Vance, but the latter did fall back and ride beside Mollie. Whatever her object was, Miss Vance made herself agreeable. She had all the necessary qualifications.

Possessed of a good figure and handsome face, she had a musical voice which she used to good advantage. When she talked she charmed the listener, but when she had returned to Madame Granville there was a difference of opinion in each person's mind as to whether her charming qualities were real or assumed.

To speak more clearly, neither Mollie, Yank nor Sam knew just how to take Miss Vance. If it had not been for the unfavorable circumstances under which she appeared, each one would have thought well of her.

As it was—the past stood like a warning finger pointing to the fair Estella.

As the afternoon wore on, Yank's uneasiness increased. Riding with the main party he was not able to look for those "signs" which spoke so clearly to him as an old Indian-fighter, and as it seemed like running headlong into an abyss of danger, he determined to go on a scout.

Paradise Sam was as good a protector as Mollie could have, and there did not seem likely to be any internal disturbance before the supper-halt was made.

The mountaineer communicated his idea to his young friends and, receiving their approval, proceeded to carry it out. He drew off to one side, and finally separated himself entirely from the party.

He paused under a single tree and looked steadily around. The only living things visible at that moment were Moses and his horse—the latter, by the way, not being the animal which he had rode when he was ambushed by the assassins in the gulch when following the stage. He had secured a new horse, and one which had already proved himself superior to the other.

A feeling of great satisfaction came over the mountaineer as he found himself once more practically alone. Genial as he always was, he was never so happy as when on the prairie with no companions but his dog and horse.

To him, the prairies, mountains and woods were home, and no other place could equal them. He had never found a better friend than Nature, and Nature reigns in the woods, waters and rocks.

Yank's gaze fell to his dog.

"All ready fur business, Moses?" he asked.

Moses threw out his nose and sniffed the air.

"To be sure—to be sure! Anxious ter take the trail, ain't ye? So be I. It's be'n some time sence we've be'n on sech a trip, an' this time we're ter look fur our old enemies, the Injuns. Land o' Goshen! how much fun we've had with 'em in the past, Moses! How many a time we've locked horns with 'em, as 'twere. Who got the best on't, dog? Fur be it from me ter boast, but I consait the Yellowbird pedigree didn't suffer no blot—not much, it didn't. Wal, le's be off. Git up, hoss! Come on, Moses."

Holding his rifle ready for use, and keeping close watch by the way, the mountaineer started off at a trot. He knew the country fairly well in that region, and was aware that by deviating slightly from the course pursued by the fugitives, he could cover a certain stretch of ground in one-third the time, and by traveling half the distance occupied by the wagons.

This was just what he wished to do, and he rode along at good speed, with Moses keeping beside the horse.

Their course was toward what seemed a high ridge, almost impassable to a horse, but Yank was not at loss for a way to get beyond it. The ridge, which had turned the ignorant fugitives southward, was divided at one point by a narrow defile, through which the veteran had been before.

As he neared the ridge he redoubled his caution, but not a hostile sign did he see.

He entered the defile, but the same order of things prevailed.

The lack of hostile "signs" did not serve to put him off his guard, and he preserved the same quietly alert air that had marked his manner from the first. He rode through the defile, and reached the sparsely-wooded prairie which stretched away to the east.

Before riding further he dismounted and examined the ground carefully. No tracks were to be seen of men or horses. He remounted and resumed his way, but bore to the right and soon reached a depression, or small ravine, which, as he well knew, extended entirely across the prairie.

By riding in this he could move without leaving any part of his person visible to prying or hostile eyes.

From that point he rode slowly and carefully.

He went quietly, but his eyes were never at rest. They studied the ground; they darted a glance at every bush and rock on the sides of the depression; and, now and then, he rose in the stirrups and looked attentively across the prairie to the right and left.

By assuming this position he gained a free view, but when seated in the saddle, he was invisible to any one who might be on the level.

The way became more thickly wooded, both in the depression and on the level, and he could gain only a partial view of the prairie, but he utilized it to the utmost, and looked long and earnestly through the breaks in the trees.

It was at one of these points that he gained his first real clew.

As he rose in the stirrups on one occasion he saw, well out on the prairie, a gap as wide as a country road. Just as he directed his gaze there, some object passed the narrow way. The mountaineer quickly raised his hand to shield his eyes. A second object passed—a third followed.

Nevermiss nodded sharply.

"Sioux, by burley!" he declared.

The fact could not be doubted. Man after man passed the open space until over a score had made themselves temporarily visible; then the supply seemed to be exhausted.

Yank settled down in the saddle once more. His expression was grave. Where the Indians were going he did not know, nor could he tell if they were aware of the proximity of the white fugitives; but one thing was very evident. The two parties were heading for a common point, and only chance could prevent a meeting between them.

The mountaineer glanced toward the sun. That luminary was fast nearing the horizon; night was not far distant. He did not know Harker Drake's plans, nor whether he intended to travel during the night, but the condition of the horses made this doubtful. Drake lacked the wisdom necessary to see that, if he was bound to travel, the safest time to do it was after dark, it seemed. Having over-exerted the animals already, he was likely to rest that night—if the Sioux would let him.

Nevermiss was in a very thoughtful mood as he continued his course.

"Human judgment ain't always reliable," he soliloquized. "We're all liable ter make egregious mistakes, an' I ain't perfect. My left foot is inclined to git skeered when thar's danger, an' be a weak sister, an' my frame is frequently shook by voy'lent nervous pains. I ain't perfect, Moses—not much, I ain't!"

The speaker looked gravely at his four-footed friend, and emphasized his remarks by shaking his long forefinger in the old, queer way. Moses tossed his head. He evidently wished to bark gently, but he had noted his master's mood and drawn inferences from it. The old spell of Indian-fighting was upon Nevermiss, and Moses's instinct informed him of the fact.

"Not bein' perfect," Yank added, "I can't say jest what is best fur our little woman, but I don't fancy the idee o' runnin' kerslap inter these red insex. I don't, by burley! I have a feelin' that, when I git back ter camp, I'll suggest to Mollie an' Sam'l that we cut loose from the headlong scamperers; an' try it on our own hook."

The veteran seemed to find considerable satisfaction in this idea, and rode on more briskly.

His vigilance did not once cease, and he was making no idle journey. He was riding in a course almost parallel with that of the Indians he had seen, and as the depression gradually inclined to the left, he expected to make further discoveries.

Half a mile further on he reined in his horse. The depression had become deeper, so he could not see the prairie, and he was not satisfied to ride blindly. He quietly dismounted.

"I'll make a bit of a scout," he observed, aloud, "an' ef I don't see anything, I consait I may as wal go back ter the crowd. I don't feel wholly easy about Mollie, even if Sam'l is thar. I'd hate like the mischief ter have harm come ter that little woman!"

CHAPTER XIV.

SIOUX SCALP-HUNTERS.

The mountaineer stationed his horse in a thicket where he would not be likely to attract attention, if any enemy came near, and then ascended the northern bank of the depression. He was not oblivious to the fact that Moses was sniffing the air critically, and exhibiting some uneasiness, and as the dog possessed qualities nearly as remarkable in his way as the best of bordermen, Yank used extra care.

He ascended the bank at a point where it was crested with a thicket, and then parted the leaves and looked through.

A deeply interesting scene lay before him.

Only a few trees dotted the prairie beyond, but they were huge, majestic specimens, and the view through them must have been interest-

ing at all times. It was doubly so at the moment Nevermiss looked.

There was more than inanimate life on the prairie. Men and horses were there, and the men were Sioux warriors. They were gathered in a group, and the last rays of the sun fell upon a formidable array of weapons.

Sioux warriors on the war-path!

One look was enough to satisfy Yank of this, and he laid his long rifle by his side with a grimly suggestive quickness. The Sioux were but a short distance away, and trouble might at any moment occur. Moses thrust his nose through the bushes, and his resolute face became hostile and threatening, but not a sound passed his lips.

"A poity little fam'ly gatherin'," commented the veteran. "'Bout thirty odd on 'em, an' their muskles fairly ache fur skulps. I've see'd Sioux before, an' I know their way. The time may come when they kin settle down an' be quiet-like, an' be satisfied ter be market gardeners like my ancestor, Adam Yellow bird, was at Eden; but the time ain't come yet. They'd ruther turn up hair than 'arth, an' their scythes are skulpin'-knives. Land o' Goshen! how many times the atrocious insex hev chased me!"

The mountaineer's face glowed with pleasure as he remembered the old-time scenes, and then he turned his gaze upon the dog for a moment.

"Did they ketch me, Moses?" he asked. "Did they git my skulp? Did they burn me at the stake? Wal, ef they did, I never realized it—I didn't, by burley!"

The Sioux were having a consultation. Their horses showed signs of recent service, though they were in excellent condition, and the manner of the warriors was earnest and grim. Several of them spoke, one after another, and, as they talked, they frequently motioned to the four points of the compass.

If they were not looking for stray white fugitives Yank was greatly mistaken, but he doubted if they were yet aware of the proximity of Drake's party.

After a while they seemed to come to some understanding. Two of their number gave the word to their horses and shot away toward the east with headlong speed. They were quickly out of sight, concealed by the trees, but already the others had sprung from their horses. Everything indicated a halt only temporarily, and they began to move around idly.

"They've sent messengers ter other red insex, an' are waitin' their report," was Yank's easy solution of the situation; "an' jedgin' by the course them two chaps took, thar's more o' their gang over east. That's jest whar Harker Drake means ter take his squad. Wal, let him do it—Mollie, Sam'l an' I don't go with him."

Moses's lips parted in an ominous way, revealing his dangerous teeth, as two of the warriors sauntered toward the thicket. Yank had time to retreat, but the Sioux' mien was so quiet that he felt sure there was no danger in remaining.

Brawny, savage-looking fellows were the red-men, and Nevermiss smiled as he wondered how they would feel to know that he, their old-time, hated foe, was so near.

They paused within a few yards of the veteran's covert.

"Something must be done!" declared one. "Some evil spirit seems to be guiding us. We have not a scalp to show, while other warriors must be reaping a harvest."

"Our turn will come," answered the second man.

"When?"

"Before morning, perhaps."

"And perhaps not at all. Are we any nearer than we were? You or I cannot say positively: we have seen no one with a pale skin. When Death-Hand led us here he said many white men and women would flee across this prairie, because it was a natural gateway to the east; and as he was a great warrior, we believed him. How has it been? Not a scalp can we show!"

"Is my brother an Indian?"

"I am an Indian and a Sioux!" was the proud reply.

"And you are the son of Arrow Eye?"

"I am Heavy Knife, the son of Arrow Eye."

"I remember your father when you were a child. He was a great warrior—and he was patient. Once a white man did him wrong, but hid in the blue-coats' fort where Arrow Eye could not go. A full moon Arrow Eye lay in wait in a thicket, watching for his enemy. When he came out, the Indian shot him dead. That is what Arrow Eye, your father, accomplished by patience!"

The younger warrior bowed his head at once.

"Your reproof is just," he admitted. "You are an older brave than I, and I will bear to your counsel. I will be patient, but my fingers itch for the white men's scalps."

"You may have them before another sun rises. Wait until we hear from Death-Hand."

"Would that some good chance would send us victims at once. I would give much to see a white man within reach, now. I would crush him like a dry stick!"

A contemptuous smile parted Yank Yellowbird's lips.

"Oh! you poor ijjit!" he muttered, "how I pity ye! Natur' don't do jest the right thing when she sets up a man in business 'thout any stock—in other words, don't give him any brains. Harker fur a fight, do ye, ye atrocious red insex? Wal, by hurley! ef it wa'n't fur the women an' children whose lives depend on secrecy, I'd give ye a taste o' fightin' that would be mortal interestin'!"

"Be patient!" again advised the second Indian.

The choleric young warrior turned impatiently away.

"How can I be when all the other parties are beating ours?" he asked, curtly.

His companion seemed to be his very antithesis, and he again entered upon an elaborate essay. Probably he brought in the redoubtable Arrow Eye, but Yank did not wait to see. As they receded, he beat a silent retreat from the thicket. He had learned all that was necessary.

Indians were at hand in considerable numbers; they were on the watch for white fugitives; they had correctly judged that the prairie would become an avenue of flight; and if Harker Drake's party went on, it was likely to run headlong into the red enemy and be utterly destroyed.

There was no time to be lost in getting back. Yank intended to warn Drake fully, though he doubted if his words would be heeded. Mollie, however, must be at once separated from the fugitives, if they persisted in going on.

Reaching his horse the mountaineer rode along the back-track.

The distance through the gully was soon covered, and then he reached the ridge. There was no time to pass through the defile—the only really safe way—and he took the only alternative. The edge of the prairie next to the higher ground was fairly well wooded, making the chances decidedly in Yank's favor; so he changed his course and went over the ground rapidly.

Darkness was fast coming on, and by the time he reached the edge of the ridge he could see but a short distance in advance. He paused and looked sharply about, seeking to distinguish the party of fugitives, but without success until, some distance in the rear, he saw the light of a fire.

The mountaineer's mild gray eyes grew stern.

He had warned Drake not to have any fire kindled at night, yet one had been built with total disregard of all danger.

"The egregious ijjits!" Nevermiss exclaimed. "Ef ever I see'd folks bound ter go headlong ter destruction, it's them. Wal, let 'em go! I know sartain persons who won't keep 'em company; not much, we won't!"

He hurried on and soon approached the scene. A smile of pitying contempt appeared on his face as he saw how Drake had pitched the camp. It had been located in a depression, which was all well enough, but that was the only trace of common sense. Having found this place, Drake had permitted a large fire to be built, evidently thinking that the higher ground would entirely conceal it. He had never reasoned more incorrectly; the light, rising above the slender barrier, was visible miles away to an experienced gaze.

That no guards were posted was shown when Yank rode to the bank without seeing a single person, but as he reached a point of observation there was enough for him to look at.

He reined in his horse and looked down to the gully where the camp was made, and the light of the fire revealed a striking scene.

There was something wrong in the camp.

At one side stood Paradise Sam and Mollie. The former held a revolver with one hand, and his manner, though calm, was suggestive of trouble at hand.

A few yards away stood the main body of the fugitives, while between the two parties, facing Sam and Mollie, was Harker Drake, his expression hostile and menacing. Plainly, his anger was directed against the young couple, and he had all, or nearly all, his followers in sympathy with him; but he was fearlessly confronted.

"Stand back!" sternly ordered Paradise Sam. "We will not be driven from camp, and the man who touches us does so at his peril!"

Yank's face flushed angrily. The petty spite of Harker Drake was at once visible; he was thinking of personal grudges and jealousies, when all his care was needed to save his party. Sharply Yank spoke to his horse; then he dashed down the bank with headlong haste.

CHAPTER XV.

TRouble IN CAMP.

A SHORT, ominous pause followed Yank's appearance on the scene. The crowd had fallen back from the rush of the horse, and the animal and its rider had taken place near Sam and Mollie.

An important addition had been made to the smaller party in the altercation.

The mountaineer gazed steadily at the other men, and his face seemed almost like that of another person. His mild gray eyes were now

stern, and the mouth which seemed so humorous in moments of pleasure was set and severe. The settlers shrunk back from his angry gaze like beaten curs.

Slowly Nevermiss turned to his young friend.

"Paradise Sam," he said in quick, sharp tones, "what's goin' on hyar?"

One of the Pilot's arms arose, and an accusing finger was pointed at the settlers. The gesture was impressive, and the men wavered perceptibly.

"Those scoundrels," tersely replied Paradise Sam to Yank's question, "say that we must leave camp!"

"Leave camp?"

"Yes."

"Who says so?"

"I do!"

With this brief reply, Harker Drake stepped to the front.

The glance which Yank Yellowbird bent upon him was not one of excitement, menace or violent anger. The announcement of the Pilot was too clear to admit of any doubt; but, on the whole, Yank had seemed to grow more self-possessed when he heard it. How much there might be back, no one knew, but his manner was strangely calm as he faced Harker Drake.

"So you're the man, be ye?"

"Yes."

"Who d'ye want should leave camp?"

"You, Perkins and the girl."

"Why?"

"Because we won't have you here!"

"Notbin' could be clearer than that," dryly commented the mountaineer. "You have a certain logikel way o' statin' things which is peculiarly yer own. Sech arguments can't help havin' a good 'eal o' effeck, an' I should say they would stan' a poote fair chance o' convincin' an' asylum full o' deer men."

"If you can't hear, I'll find a way to make you!" shouted Drake, angrily.

"How?"

"With this!"

The hot-headed man held up his rifle, but Ames Rochester stepped quickly forward and pushed down the weapon.

"Control yourself!" he exclaimed, commanding. "I only consented to this on condition that no violence was used by either party."

"Thar won't be any voy'lence," Yank calmly replied. "Nobody need ter quarrel when everybody is agreed. Mister Drake says my party must quit the camp. I answer that so fur from tryin' ter oppose his order, we shall go inside of fifteen minutes, whether or no. I have too much respect fur the hair on top of my head ter stay hyar."

"Have your fears scared up more Indians?" sneered Harker Drake.

"Be you still thar, Mister Drake! I see you, now. Suppose we put off our pussonal talk a bit; I have one word more ter say to these good people afore I leave camp."

"They don't want to hear you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes; and, what is more, you will not be allowed to speak. I give you two minutes to get out of—"

"Mister, I've lived some years in this part o' the land," Yank interrupted, in a mild voice, "an' I've always been my own boss. With your leave, I'll stay so. I won't take two minutes o' your time, nor any other period set by you, fur I come an' go on my own time. I sha'n't leave hyar until I git ready! Hev you anything ter say ter that?"

The mountaineer's voice was not raised above its usual key, and he gave no sign of violence, but, however it was with Drake, he frightened all the other fugitives nearly out of their wits by a certain dignity which they not only saw but felt; and when Ames Rochester expressed a wish to have Nevermiss speak, there was a general chorus of approval.

"I won't keep ye long," replied Yank, with a nod. "I don't hanker ter stay in these parts, myself. Before I go, I'll give ye a word o' caution. You've chose Harker Drake yer leader, but you know he an' I have had a diff'rence of opinion. He says the proper way ter cheat the Sioux out o' your skulps is ter run for the settlements like hurley. I say the hour fur safe runnin' is past; that the Injins are layin' fur jest sech parties as this; an' that, as the uprisin' can't be long-lived, the safest way is ter take to the hills an' stay thar."

"Sound logic!" commented Sam Perkins.

"Seems to me to be a difference of opinion," added Rochester, mildly.

"You ain't heerd all," continued Yank. "I've b'en on a scout this afternoon, an' this is what I seen: Dead ahead o' you is a band o' Sioux warriors on the hunt fur white men's skulps—yes, an' fur the skulps of women an' children, too. The leader o' the gang is called Death-Hand—ruther a suggestive name. I crawled up nigh these red insex an' heerd them talk, an' I know what I tell ye about. They are layin' for ye, an' ef you don't scud ter the mountains, your chances are egregious poor."

"I'd like to know how you got all this information," declared Drake, suspiciously.

"Didn't I tell ye?"

"You said you crawled up near them—"

"That was it."

"How did you know where to find them—"

"Land o' Goshen! I wish I's knowin' to a common-sense factory that could supply a little wit to you, mister! You tire me out—you do, by hurley! I found the red varmints by lookin' fu' them, but ef you carry out your plans you won't force them ter look for you; you'll run kerslap inter them like sheep ter slaughter."

The mountaineer turned quietly to his friends.

"Sam'l, ef you'll git ready, we'll leave camp."

"Are you going to leave us in our hour of peril?"

It was a new, nervous, highly-pitched voice, and it was that of a woman. Yank turned and saw Estella Vance, who had started forward from the other women. She looked pale and troubled.

"Young woman," Nevermiss gravely answered, "I have tol' your frien's that the Sioux are within less than two mile on 'em. What more kin I do?"

"Would it not be better for all if we were to remain in one party? There is strength in union."

"True as you live, but I hev at least one precious life in my care. The only way ter protect it is ter skip fur yender mountains 'thout delay. We are goin'. Now, mind, I don't desert nobody hyar. It ain't too late fur you ter save yerselves. I don't want ter interfere with Harker Drake's lead, but ef any ov you want ter go in this party, we'll take ye gladly, an' fight for ye to the last, ef need be!"

Paradise Sam had been working nimbly, and had made ready his horse and Mollie's.

Both had mounted, and they were ready for the start.

"That's sound sense!" declared Sam, in his heartiest manner. "You've talked severe to me to-night, but I reckon I sent back as good as I got, and I'm not the man to bear grudge. Who goes our way?"

The settlers exchanged glances, and more than one woman looked appealingly at husband or brother. Mollie, gazing steadfastly at Estella Vance, saw her speak to Rochester, but that person did not answer. No one answered. There was more than one person present whose mind misgave him—or her—in that crisis, but, though they wavered, they had a little before been so strongly in favor of Drake that no one moved.

"Don't all speak at once!" put in Drake, with a return of confidence.

"I'll bet that if one leads the way, all would follow!" declared Paradise Sam.

"We can't wait," observed Yank, looking around uneasily.

"Last call, ladies and gentlemen!" announced the Pilot, cheerfully.

Still no one moved.

"We'll go," gravely spoke Yank Yellowbird. "I feel a good bit sorry ter leave women an' children in sech peril, but I hope you'll b'ar in mind that I have tried my best ter save ye. Good-by!"

He started his horse and, followed by Mollie and Sam, ascended the bank. At the top he looked back for the last time. The settlers were moving uneasily, but there was no change in the situation. Yank, Sam and Mollie rode away toward the southern mountains.

Every one felt the gravity of the separation, and as it seemed that the deluded settlers would pay a dear price for their error of judgment, those who would have been their friends were downcast, despite the fact that resolutions had been passed to drive them out.

The buoyant nature of Paradise Sam was the first to rebound, and the Pilot gently hummed the lines of his favorite song:

"It is the land for men of sand—
The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

"Egregious weak heads ain't no business here, though," commented Yank, with a complaining tone new to him.

"They'll have to lie in their bed."

"Was they kickin' up rough before I come, Sam'l?"

"Slightly, general—yes, I must say they were a bit rough!" replied Sam, with a laugh. "They ordered Mollie and me out of camp. I refused to go. Drake said they would put us out. I told him it would cost them just as many men as they had in the party. My choice of words was absurd. If I remember rightly I said: 'I am Paradise Sam, cock of the walk, and compound of grizzly bear and panther! Touch me if you dare!' I gave them some such nonsense, but they did not seem to be greatly impressed by my martial bearing, and you barely averted a riot."

"Tbar did come nigh bein' a riot," Nevermiss agreed. "I was mortal wrathful when I seen the state of affairs, but I looked at the women an' children an' tried ter govern my temper."

"You did the best you could, kind friend," said Mollie, touching his hand with hers.

"It didn't work, though. I'm mortal sorry, for Drake has bewitched 'em an' spilt their judgment. I hope it'll all be right, but I fear for them—I do, by hurley!"

CHAPTER XVI.

RIFLE-SHOTS ON THE PRAIRIE.

SEVERAL times Yank looked back, hoping that some of the settlers would reconsider their determination, but when this hope vanished, the party quickened their horses' steps and went toward the mountain at good speed.

Darkness had settled closely upon the earth, and, to Mollie, their course seemed to be merely a going into a black area, but there was method in all that Yank did. Before night fell he had studied the mountain well, and located the various peaks, and by the latter landmarks he was now moving toward a definite point.

Whether they would find a suitable refuge there he did not know.

He was by no means sure that they would reach the mountain without a collision with the Sioux, but reach it they did. It was a great relief to all when the dark points and lines of the rocky slope held out its welcoming arms, as it were, to receive them. Certainly, the uncertainties of the dark gulches were better than prairie, with the chances of meeting the Indians.

Paradise Sam began to sing softly:

"The West, the West, the boundless West!
It is the land for men of sand!

Here Nature greets each happy quest,

And grants the object of his quest."

"Thar's Natur' enough 'round hyar ter fill any want," commented the mountaineer. "Thar's an egregious pile o' rocks, trees, bushes an' other things, but they're a mortal sight better than Injuns in a hostile state o' mind."

"I feel sorry for that girl!" Mollie announced, abruptly.

"Zoe!"

"She calls herself Estella Vance—now."

"Why be you specially sorry fur her?"

"I became interested in her at Starvation City, and, strange as subsequent events have been, I cannot get rid of that interest."

"It don't seem to be mutual," dryly observed Sam.

"Believe me, she has some reason for her singular conduct!" persisted Mollie.

Paradise Sam ventured to shrug his shoulders skeptically, first making sure that he would not be detected. He admired Mollie, and, in most matters, had profound respect for her judgment, but the accounts he had seen of the mysterious young lady referred to did not give him a very marked faith in her. She might be one girl or two girls—as far as name went—and she might be telling the truth or uttering falsehoods. Be that as it might, the hearty, frank young Pilot regarded her as too mysterious, contradictory and uncertain for him.

Yank's faith was not much stronger than Sam's, and as neither man made any reply, the subject was dropped.

Mollie, however, was unhappy. Her heart was big and warm, and she pitied Estella Vance. This statement does not by any means indicate that she believed implicitly in Miss Vance, for she was too practical to be inclined to blind faith; but when they left the settlers' camp, she had seen Estella give them a look which very much reminded her of the terrified regard of Zoe Rochester's dark eyes in the Starvation City days.

The look haunted her, try as she would not to be influenced by it.

Yank Yellowbird never lost his belief that their present movements were necessary. All remained quiet on the prairie, and the settlers' camp-fire had disappeared—a proof that the veteran's advice had not been wholly disregarded—but he had no faith in the quiet calmness.

He expected to see the settlers attacked before morning, and when they were disposed of, the Sioux were not likely to overlook the smaller party. Had opportunity been given, Yank would have tried to break the trail, but, under the circumstances, it was out of the question.

Whatever was done in that line must be deferred until morning. In the mean while it was to their advantage to ascend to a point near the mountain-top, so that they could find a covert in the morning with as little moving about as possible.

It was not wise to tempt the Sioux' keen eyes.

After a long, difficult journey over the rough mountain-side they reached a point which commanded itself to Yank's critical eyes, and he called for a halt.

"You have chosen the wildest place of all," said Mollie.

"I consait so; I tried ter."

"It is a chip right from the heart of Nature," asserted Sam. "If it were not for the red skins I'd like to warble my favorite song. These rocks and trees make me feel musical."

"They would delight a poet," Mollie added. "I've had no eend o' experience with poetry," declared Yank, with confidence, "an' I've took reg'lar lessons at it in my day. My female cousin, Sukie Minnie Hattie Nettie Yellowbird, was a master-hand ter turn off poems, an' some on 'em was as easy understood as a perlitikel speech. She didn't slight her work, an' she wore the spellin'-book out so that her marm finally took ter usin' it fur a nutmeg-grater

"On one occasion I was egregiously in love with a poaty, red-headed gal named Charity Ann Tewksbury, but I dassent tell her so, an' my cousin knewed it. She finally talked it over with me, an' I owned up I couldn't git spunk enough ter face Charity. 'Never mind,' sez my cousin, 'I'll put yer idees in po'try, an' you kin send it by mail.'

"She writ it up, an' I must say it had some mortal good p'ints. The writin' was fu'st-class, an' the last words o' the lines jingled as harmonious as you please. I spelled it out quite pleased at fu'st, but I began ter hav my doubts.

"You make me coax her ter go ter my cottage by the sea," sez I. "Whar is that egregious cottage?" sez I.

"That's a romantic expression, the cottage is," sez my cousin, chipper.

"Tis, hey?" sez I. "Has it got wood in the box, 'taters in the suller, flour in the pantry, an' a fertyle garding full o' onions an' cabbages, close ter hand an' ready fur use?" sez I.

"Nonsense!" sez she. "Go on!"

"Nex'," sez I, "you make me ask her ter fly with me. Whar is the wings?" sez I.

"Don't be skepterkel," sez my cousin.

"I won't," sez I, "but I'll be condemn'd ef I kin fly without wings. What's this?" sez I. "Her bright auburn tresses! What's them?" sez I.

"Tresses means hair," sez she.

"Does, hey?" sez I. "Does auburn mean nose or eyes?" sez I.

"Auburn means a poetic golden hue," sez she.

"Golden hair, eh? Why, land o' Goshen?" sez I, "Charity Ann's hair is redder than our three-year-old heifer's. 'Tis, by burley!" sez I.

"Never mind!" sez my cousin, quick an' peppery, fur her dander was risin'; 'ef you don't like the poem, go an' write one yerself."

"She bad me thar, my cousin did; fur I couldn't write verses no more nor a brindled cat could sing Star Spangled Banner, an' I begged her pardon an' read on. The nex' line was, 'Become my wife an' we will live forever arter in an egstarin' dream—no: 'twas 'exstatic dream,' I b'lieve. At this I hove the poem away."

"Twon't do!" sez I.

"Why not?" sez my cousin, savage-like.

"I objeck ter livin' the rest o' my life in a dream. Not any fur me!" sez I. "Ef you'd s'perienced the condemn'd dreams I hev," sez I, "an' had sech egregious nightmares, an' tribulations with snakes, grizzly b'ars an' robbers, you wouldn't want ter live forever in a dream. Not much, you wouldn't!" sez I. "I hear Charity is a mortal big eater, an' she might posserbly be kep' cheaper ef asleep; but who'd make the fires mornin's? Who'd sweep the floors? Who'd milk the cows an' chop the wood?" sez I. "I feel grateful ter you, cousin, but ef you don't keer, I'll ask the gal my way; an' not commit myself on paper ter any rash promises. Charity is big enough to work, instead o' foolin' away her time in a dream," sez I, "an' she'll 'arn her way when she gits inter the Yellowbird fam'ly!"

"With this I left the room unceremonious, an' my cousin was mad as a hatter; but when she heerd, nex' week, that I'd perposed ter Charity an' got the mitten, she come 'round good an' pleasant, my cousin did; an' she writ an algebra poem fur me 'bout 'Vanished Joys,' that tetched me ter the quick. I know'd how it was myself."

The mountaineer had not told this story with his usual zest. At some points he fell into the old, whimsical utterance, but his gaze frequently wandered to the plain below, or the rocks and trees about them.

Plainly, he was not at ease.

Paradise Sam's voice arose lightly as he sung in almost inaudible tones:

"The West, the West, the boundless West!—
It is the land for men of sand!
Here Nature greets each happy guest,
And grants the object of his quest."

Yank arose abruptly.

"Wal sung, by burley!" he declared. "It ain't no idle flattery, Sam'l, when I say I'd a heap ruther hear you sing than any Sioux warrior I ever run ag'in'."

"General, accept my thanks," coolly laughed the Pilot. "And now, suppose you confide in us. You are uneasy. Surely, you don't expect any red-skins to be up on this mountain-side?"

"It don't seem noways likely, but unexpected things often happen when we ain't lookin' for 'em. Rec'leck distinctly that my parients frequently thrashed me when I wa'n't lookin' for it, but I understand now that 'twas done ter give exercise fur them an' me. It raised a muscle fur them, and brought out my good qualities egregiously. They did it with a shingle, my parients did; an' thar wa'n't a time durin' my youth but fragments o' my pantaloons was clingin' ter the slivers o' the shingie."

"Ha! ha! ha!" laughed Sam. "No wonder the Yellowbirds turn out well, with such teaching."

"Oh! it's good fur the mind, but you couldn't convince my body on't when I's young."

Yank was tapping his fingers thoughtfully upon the barrel of his rifle, but his irresolution suddenly vanished as the silence was as abrupt-

ly broken. Out on the air sounded the report of a rifle, faint and far away, and one of the mountaineer's hands mechanically flashed to his eyes as he peered down toward the prairie.

"The tribulation has begun, by burley!" he exclaimed.

He had located the shot with unerring skill, but even a novice would not have been long at fault. The first report was followed by others, which came with startling rapidity, and told a story all might read.

Mollie imitated the example of the men and arose to her feet. Looking down to the prairie, she saw there a succession of vivid flashes which died away as soon as they were revealed, but others followed as an irregular volley was fired.

"Merciful heavens!" Mollie gasped; "the settlers are attacked!"

"I consait so," Yank admitted, soberly.

"Heaven help them!"

"They wouldn't take our help; perhaps they will reject heaven's," replied Sam, with more ill-will than was usual to him.

"Will they be murdered?" asked the girl, turning anxiously toward Nevermiss.

"I hope not, little woman, but I'm glad we ain't thar."

The firing continued, but now only irregularly, and at distinct intervals. Yank saw what he forbore to mention—that the location of the flashes was varied, indicating that one party was fleeing from the other. Now and then a faint shout was heard.

The watching trio stood in painful silence, while Moses sniffed the air in uneasiness and uttered an occasional growl. Anon, however, the firing ceased, and a profound, ominous silence hung over the prairie. The fight, whatever its results, was over.

CHAPTER XVII.

NEVERMISS BRINGS STRANGE COMPANY.

YANK YELLOWBIRD suddenly aroused.

"I consait," he observed, in measured tones, "that we may as well find a place and spread our blankets. It ain't an arton o' use ter think o' keepin' the roses in our cheeks 'thout a proper amount o' sleep. My marm always tol' my sister, Priscilla Dorcas Serena, that fact. She tried it, my sister did; but the only roses she had in her cheeks was yarler ones an' freckles. Hows'er, we'd better risk sleep, jest the same."

Mollie laid her hand on the speaker's arm.

"Mountaineer," she replied, "do you intend to lie down?"

"Land o' Goshen! yes—why not?"

"I can read you better than you think."

"What do you read, little woman?"

"You are going down to the prairie!"

"Who? Me? What the mischief do I want down thar?"

"You want to do good, as you always do. Your heart is too big and kind for your own good and safety. I can read your mind well, old friend. The possibility that you can do good is a magnet which draws you toward the prairie."

Nevermiss shifted his rifle uneasily from one arm to the other.

"Don't know what put sech an idee inter yer mind, by burley!" he declared. "I never said anything o' the sort, did I, Sam'l?"

"Don't appeal to Samuel. He knows, as I do, that you contemplate going into the midst of the Sioux, to see if you can help one of the whites."

"Oh! wal, I dunno—"

"Innocent Yank. Your guilelessness is like an open book, kind old friend. You know you are putting your life in jeopardy, and you cannot hide it from me. I honor you for it, though I knew before how noble you were, but I must ask you to think twice before you act. Bear in mind that those persons scorned your aid and drove you from the camp."

"The men did, Mollie, an' fur them I ain't got but a mortal little pity; but think o' the women an' children! Think o' them, Mollie!"

The girl did not reply.

"I'll call ter your attention the fact that I'm a tough old borderer, an' what I don't know about Injun ways it would be hard ter larn. I'm somethin' of a fighter, too, as most any Injun will tell ye. I dunno what my forefathers would say ter hear a Yellowbird braggin' so atrociously—'specially one beset with voy'len newrolgy—but I want ter convince ye I kin hold my own down thar."

"I know, but—"

"Think o' the women an' children, Mollie! Think o' them! I knew your heart is kind an' tender, fur I've seen it tried, an' you won't turn a deaf ear to a suff'rin' sister woman. What s'pose you was in sech a scrape, Mollie? Land o' Goshen! I'd have ye away or die in tryin'—I would, by burley! Think o' the other women!"

The tall mountaineer's voice had sunk to a low, gentle tone as persuasive as a woman's, and he almost unconsciously laid his big, brown hand upon hers as she held it out to stop him. The touch was as magnetic as the voice, and she impulsively raised his hand to her lips.

"You are the noblest of men," she murmured.

"It is not for me to say what you shall, or shall

not do, but I implore you to guard your life carefully!"

"Sound advice, general, by George!" exclaimed Sam.

"My young friends, you touch a soft spot in my heart," replied the veteran, in a low voice. "I'm proud o' your good opinion, an' thankful to ye in all ways; but if you'll think a bit, you'll see that one thing is nec'sary ter keep up the Yellowbird pedigree—it mustn't be said I lef' any weak, helpless woman in tribulation."

He shouldered his rifle.

"I leave ye byar in a tolerable secure place, an', Mollie, I know you kin depend on Sam'l. Don't fear fur me; I'll keep out o' the claws o' the red insex, an' you'll see me back all right 'fore mornin'. Good-night."

Both answered, and then the mountaineer turned away.

Moses had been watching eagerly, and when a motion informed him that he was to go also, he so far departed from his usual dignity as to cut an unmistakable caper. His levity soon vanished, though, and the glance he sent back seemed capable of being interpreted as a mute expression of contrition and shame.

When he had gone a few feet the mountaineer turned and waved his hand; then he went on and the darkness speedily closed around him.

Sam heard Mollie sigh, and he spoke in his usual cheerful voice:

"Don't be cast down, Miss Dixon; it'll all come out right. Remember who our friend is. If there is any man who can go through the crash successfully it is Yank Yellowbird. By George! I admire that man! Scout, hunter, trapper, guide—he is all that the wide West affords. He knows Indians as a scholar knows the alphabet, and, my word for it, he won't get A mixed with Z, or fail to mind his P's and Q's."

Mollie smiled faintly.

"You are as cheerful as ever," she observed.

"Bless you, yes! Why shouldn't I be? How can any one be otherwise in this glorious country!"

"It is the land for men of sand—
The wide, the free, the boundless West!"

"Do you know, Mollie, I was born and bred in the East—the tame, the crowded, effete East. It was the lay-out that I should have a first-class education and be a lawyer. I took a part of the education and skipped all of the lawyer. Came West, and am trying to grow up with the country. I suppose I am more cheerful than the average. I came by my sobriquet in that way; a man who is always happy may be said to be in Paradise. Hence, the application, Paradise Sam."

The Pilot rattled on in his heartiest manner, and Mollie could not help being encouraged somewhat. In a measure his good humor was like Yank's—it was contagious, and rarely failed to make an impression.

Sam soon bestirred himself and found a desirable place for the girl to pass the night. A recess among the rocks furnished the basis, and he collected several armfuls of grass and spread them upon the hard surface. With their total supply of blankets added, a really comfortable couch was at her disposal.

It was long before she retired. A greater attraction existed, and the scene was the prairie below.

Since the firing ceased no sound or sign had been vouchsafed them. No camp-fire gleamed on the level; no shot was to be heard; no human voice broke the stillness; yet it was plain that human beings remained on the prairie.

What had happened? Had all of the fugitives fallen victims to the Sioux? If any remained alive, where were they? Where were the Indians, and what were they doing? Had they any clew to the trio who had taken to the mountains?

All these questions the girl asked herself as she looked anxiously down the mountain-side.

Into that area of darkness, mystery and danger Yank Yellowbird had gone. What would be the result?

Long watched Mollie, but her anxiety worried honest Sam Perkins, and he urged her so strongly to retire that she finally consented, more to please him than from any other motive. She was almost positive that she could not sleep at all until Yank returned.

Sam did not think of retiring. He went back to the point where Yank had left them and sat down on a rock, with his rifle leaning against his shoulder. He did not expect any danger to appear, but there he intended to keep guard. Bluff, hearty, and loud-voiced as the Pilot was, he was at heart as kind and tender as any person, and had a chivalrous instinct which told him that one of the first duties of man was to watch over and protect the fairer, weaker sex.

And he found it very pleasant to act as protector to Mollie Dixon.

The girl, herself, reclined on her easy couch and looked out of the recess at the athletic Pilot of the Northwest with deep gratitude. The rare kindness of her two friends touched her deeply, and she was thinking how fortunate she was to have such protectors when—all thoughts and scenes faded away.

Mollie slept.

All her resolutions, all her anxieties, had not been proof against the weariness caused by her hard, rough journey.

When she awoke the darkness had grown vague and shadowy, and it needed but one glance to show that day was breaking. Her anxiety and fear returned to her like a flash and she sprung to her feet. She saw Paradise Sam still at his post, and a great fear came over her.

Where was Yank?

She started forward, but as she did so, two persons turned the point of the rock at the right and stood within twenty feet of her. One glance was enough to cause her glad surprise—one of the two was Nevermiss.

The second was a woman.

Mollie looked, scarcely able to believe the evidence of her eyes.

It was Estella Vance!

The Western girl stood perfectly still, incapable of speech or movement, but Yank spoke cheerfully:

"Hello! little woman! Woke up, hev you? Wal, you're just in time, fur I was comin' to wake ye. You will obsarve that we hev' company, 'arly as it is; an' not 'zactly company, neither. We've got a new recruit, an' I consait you know her."

Estella spoke with perceptible embarrassment.

"I trust I don't intrude, Miss Dixon?"

"Intrude!" echoed the mountaineer. "Land o' Goshen! no—not an artom. Mollie will tell ye so when she gets speech, but it's an egregious surprise ter her. She didn't expeck ter see you, nobow, and we've come so 'arly that she ain't had time ter put the house in order, an' not so much the house, neither, as her wearin' apparel. We ain't got any house, but you might burn down ev'ry house in the country an' young gals would still be mortal set on havin' their raiment put in spick-span order 'fore company calls. That's the way o' women, an' I like 'em all the better fur them leetle vanities—I do, by huryey!"

CHAPTER XVIII.

OTHER MEN ON THE MOUNTAIN.

MOLLIE did not share Estella's embarrassment; she had only the surprise to overcome; and by the time Yank finished his whimsical remarks she was wholly herself. The doubts which hovered over the girl of mystery were forgotten; Mollie remembered only the attraction Estella had always possessed for her, and she quickly extended her hand.

"You are welcome!" she said, earnestly.

"And you are kind, very kind!"

Embarrassment was still visible in Estella's manner, and she withdrew her hand more quickly than seemed necessary.

"Thar ain't an artom o' doubt on these p'ints!" declared Yank, who was manifestly making a strong effort to put everybody at ease. "You're welcome, an' she's kind. All these things run in nat'ral channels, like water in a brook. I consait you see the p'int, though I ain't sure that I do."

"What has happened on the prairie?" demanded Mollie.

"Some fightin', an' some runnin'."

"And the fugitives?"

"Still fugitives."

"Are they alive?"

"I'm happy ter say that some on 'em be."

"But the fight?"

"Went ag'in' the whites, but was not a massacre. Ef Harker Drake had had his way it would 'a' been one, but sounder minds made themselves heard, an' forced Drake ter look for a safer place than that gully. The whites lost the battle, but most on 'em got ter safe quarters. I hope none o' the women or children have fell victims."

"But—this young lady?"

"Was captured."

"I fell into the bands of the Sioux," added Estella, quickly, "and it seemed that my last hours were come, but this heroic mountaineer saved me. Words are feeble to express my gratitude."

"Don't try—don't try!" hastily requested Nevermiss. "I did no more nor my duty."

"It was nobly done, and with great skill. In the fight I was separated from the rest of the party, and was captured by the savages. They tied me to a tree in the heart of their camp. Whether my fate had been decided I do not know, but words cannot describe the horror that was in my mind. I regarded hope as a thing which did not exist, and death would have been a relief!"

She covered her face nervously with her hands.

"It's all over now," mildly observed her rescuer.

"Yes—thanks to you. Oh, Miss Dixon, you cannot imagine the gratitude I feel. I do not know, even now, how he did—how he could effect my rescue; I only know that he crept into the camp as silently as a shadow, released me and took me away. This I know, but how he escaped discovery I cannot understand."

"Thirty odd years o' sech work have given me some skill, I consait," modestly returned the

mountaineer, "but this work, an' all other work, couldn't 'a' been done only that the Master o' Life looked down in sympathy an' willed it so. His care is over all who deserve it!"

Paradise Sam approached.

"General, I think we ought to be off," he remarked. "Daylight nearly has us in his clutches."

"You're right, Sam'l; you're very right. We'll go at once. Will you bring the bosses?"

Yank was not sure that the girls would get on well together if left alone; but he might have spared himself the doubt. Estella was uneasy, but Mollie put all else aside for the time, and tried to be as kind and reassuring as possible.

They were not long in getting started. Yank had selected a gulch which cut the mountain-side diagonally, and in which they would not be visible, for their course of travel; but he did not intend to go far. He had faith to believe that a refuge could be found in the region to the east.

As they were minus one horse, Yank went on foot, and, accompanied by Moses, brought up the rear.

The gulch extended for one-fourth of a mile. By the time the end was reached day had fully dawned. A halt was made, and the men looked for a refuge. Yank hoped to find a cave, but the best they could discover was a recess among the rocks, which only lacked a roof to be a secure covert.

The mountaineer left the others and ascended to a favorable point to gain view of the prairie. He was able to distinguish the Sioux readily, while off to the north, at the base of the smaller mountain, was the camp of the fugitives. There they were besieged by the red warriors.

It was supposed that Ames Rochester and Madame Granville were with them, but Yank felt little interest in them.

When he brought Estella away from the Sioux camp he had used every possible artifice to break their trail, and prevent the Indians successfully following them. This had been done in the darkness, and he was by no means sure that it would be successful. He hoped, however, that the precautions he had taken would succeed in keeping them from the mountain.

Other precautions must be taken, however, and he returned to the point where his friends had passed the night, and undertook to blind the trail beyond—a task which was not wholly hopeless, for the soil of the gulch was hard, pebble-covered and ledgy.

He worked diligently until the work was completed, and then started to rejoin his companions, but only a few rods had he gone when the report of a rifle suddenly sounded among the rocks in front.

The mountaineer's own rifle was half-raised to his shoulder; then he lowered it slowly.

"That wa'n't Sam'l's weapon that spoke, an' I don't b'lieve any o' my fam'ly is thar. I'll see!"

He advanced quickly, but cautiously, for a few yards, and then came in sight of an unexpected scene. A mountain sheep lay dead on the ground, and by the carcass stood two men. Both were of white skin and unlixed blood. One was a rather good-looking young fellow of muscular form, but though his face was bronzed by the elements, he had not the air of a veteran Western rover. The second person was of middle age, and was a tall, thin, dark-complexioned man who wore a close-fitting Prince Albert coat with an air as dignified as though he were in an Eastern parlor.

This individual was pointing to the fatal wound.

"Your shot was a good one," he observed. "The almost instantaneous death of the animal shows that the bullet touched a vital part. You will observe that it entered—"

"Never mind, Fogg!" was the impatient reply. "We can't stop for a surgical analysis now; wait until we get to the cave. If by any chance a part of those red-skins are on the mountain, they could give us points in surgery and bullets, besides. We'll carry this to the cave, and then, I believe, we have food enough for a long siege."

"Do you think I fear the Sioux?" scornfully demanded Fogg.

"I know you do."

"What's that you say?"

"Curb your choler, doctor. We would be fools not to be afraid of all those red cut-throats. It is no stain on your heroism to be prudent. Come on!"

The younger man stooped and seized the fallen animal by the legs, but at that moment Yank stepped into view.

"Shall I give ye a lift, neighbors?" he asked.

Fogg sprung two feet into the air.

"Injuns!" he yelled, and started to run, but his toe struck a stone and he fell in a heap.

"Land o' Goshen! don't git in a panic!" directed Nevermiss. "I ain't no red-skin, unless I've been changed in my cradle seince mornin'." Can't you see I'm white?"

"I do see," answered the young man, laughing, "but you are not so white as Doctor Fogg. Seems to me he has lost color all of a sudden."

Fogg gained a sitting position, and tried to recover his dignity.

"I was going for help," he explained; "but there don't seem to be any need."

"Where would you find help?" demanded his companion, still laughing.

"I decline to explain."

"All right, doctor. Stranger," to Yank, "we did not expect to see you."

"Nor me ter see you, but I consait we are wal met. I'm a scout an' mountaineer. May I ask who you be?"

"Most certainly. My name is Gilbert Herkimer, and I am traveling through the West for the fun of the thing, hunting and camping out. My eminent friend is John Adams Washington Fogg, a doctor who is looking out for botanical specimens and the like. Just now we are stocking up a butcher-shop, for we fear the Sioux will interfere with our other callings."

"Have you had a brush with 'em?"

"No—we ran!" was Herkimer's frank reply. "We have had no trouble yet, but, being on this mountain, think it prudent to stay here; so we are laying in a good supply of food. I have been very frank because you look like an honest man. May I ask who you are?"

"Why, sartain! I'm no frien' o' the Sioux, ef your partner did mistake me fur a red-skin. I'm a scout an' hunter. My name is Yank Yellowbird."

"Is it possible?" cried Herkimer, in surprise.

"I consait so, for it's a fact."

"By my life, this is good news! I've heard of you, and there is no other man I would rather meet. Friend Yellowbird, you see here two babes in the wood, as I may say. Mr. Fogg, eminent as he is in his profession, don't know an Indian from a cottonwood tree, and I'm just as bad off, or worse; but we have a cave stocked up with food. We shall be very glad to have you join us, if you will—very glad, indeed! We'll furnish food, and you shall show us how to fight Indians, if the pinch comes. What do you say?"

CHAPTER XIX.

WHAT CAME OF AN INTRODUCTION.

YANK YELLOWBIRD was as much pleased as any one to hear this address. He felt sure it was genuine in every way. Herkimer was a bright, keen, earnest-looking young man who would have been taken by no one as a renegade. As for Doctor Fogg, he was too simple-minded to be placed as a doubtful person.

Such being the case the mountaineer caught eagerly at the suggestion that the men knew of a cave.

"That's strength in union," he replied, "an' I consait we'll do wal ter jine forces."

"Good! Do you hear that, Fogg?"

"I do, sir," was the solemn reply, "and I think that the combined efforts of this gentleman and myself—with such aid as you can give—will be sufficient to interpose an unsurmountable barrier between us and the predatory, nomadic, unconscionable creatures of aboriginal extraction."

Yank looked at Doctor Fogg admiringly.

"Speaks Greek, don't he?" exclaimed the mountaineer, addressing Herkimer. "He reminds me of my brother, Philetus Elipheta Yellowbird, who studied ter be a lawyer. He could roll off Greek like the mischief. What's the English meanin' o' what Doctor Fogg said?"

"My name is Fogg, sir," stiffly observed that eminent bandler of polysyllables.

"Never mind nonsensical corrections!" Herkimer directed, impatiently. "Fogg will ride a high horse on big words, now and then, but he is harmless. Don't mind him, and don't try to understand him. With your permission, we'll take this game and go at once to our cave."

"Just the idee, neighbor."

The game was taken, and Yank's new acquaintances led the way. He was confident that they were to be trusted, but used due caution, nevertheless. When their refuge was finally located, it proved to be but a short distance from Yank's own temporary quarters.

And the cave was soon shown to be a thing of fact.

It was remarkably large, with a roof which made a fine arch overhead, and Nevermiss at once saw that it was just the place his party needed. The entrance was too broad for safety, but a little work upon it would make defense easy against anything but a most desperate assault.

Yank was satisfied, and he then explained his own situation. Herkimer was pleased to hear that others were at hand, and he heartily invited the mountaineer to bring them into the cave.

Time might be very precious, and Yank hastened back to his friends.

All had been rendered anxious by the rifle-shot, for Paradise Sam had readily recognized the fact that it was not the mountaineer's, but the report put all in good spirits. The cave was just what they had wished for, and the addition of two men was a fortunate event.

"We'll go as soon as posseble," said Yank. "Our trail mustn't show, but that shall be attended to later. The fu'st thing is ter git the women-folks under kiver, an' then I'll come back an' wipe out what sign is left."

"What's the nature of the way?" Sam asked.

"Right good fur our use. It's an egregious rocky stretch, an' a little care will make it fit ter fool the red rascals, I consait. That's right, Sam'l; help up the gals. Used ter be monstrous good at it myself, but the newrolgy has so twisted my narves an' muskles that I ain't what I was, an' I leave gallantry fur younger men."

"Nonsense, Sir Mountaineer!" cried Mollie, lightly.

"You are the prince of gallants now."

"D'y'e hear that, Sam'l?" quoth Nevermiss, his gray eyes twinkling. "Do you hear it? Land o' Goshen! who could be otherwise in such a case as this? Thar are them, pilot, who are so mortal pooty that nobody could do otherwise."

"And they're not far away, either, by George!"

Sam made the assertion with great heartiness, and the three looked at each other with much good will, but Mollie, turning suddenly, saw that Estella Vance's eyes were full of tears. The latter turned away at once, but Mollie's high spirits had received a check. She could not read unfailingly what she saw, but it was plain that sad thoughts were in Estella's mind.

"Is it that she feels herself barred out from the kind sympathy which exists here?" thought the mountain girl.

She had too much delicacy to ask the question aloud, but her feelings were gentler toward Estella as they rode toward the cave. Since the girl of mystery had joined them she had not heard one unkind word from Mollie's lips, but the latter could not forget that acquaintance with her had been denied.

Were Estella and Zoo really one, or were they different persons?

Again rose the mental question, but it remained unanswered.

When the cave was reached Herkimer was found to be absent, bringing in more wood, but Doctor Fogg received them with great pomp. The horses were led inside and placed with those of the previous occupants. Yank saw that enough grass had been gathered to last all the animals a fortnight. This was all right, but he was not forgetful of the fact that tell-tale signs must have been left in gathering it.

Herkimer returned as the mountaineer was going out, and he asked leave to bear the latter company. They went, and Nevermiss did his best to efface the trail, but he was by no means sanguine.

"How long bev you b'en 'round hyar?" he asked, as they retraced their steps.

"Three days."

"Been movin' about much?"

"Yes."

"Did you do anything ter hide your trail?"

"Did we? Why, we are as ignorant of border-craft as children. No; I am sorry to say that our trail must be plainly visible. Does that worry you, sir?"

"Wal, ef the Injuns strike this ground, they ain't goin' ter trot over trails an' never see them. I'm egregious afraid we shall see the atrocious insect 'round our way, but I consait it won't be your fault. Don't think I blame ye, for I don't."

"I should be very sorry if anything of the kind should occur, but any effort on our part to blind our trail would have been a ridiculous failure. We are wholly ignorant of border-craft."

"I consait it'll all come out wal."

Nothing could deprive Yank of his cheerfulness, but he was by that time sure that if the Sioux ascended the mountain, discovery must follow. This did not by any means indicate that the cave would be taken.

Reaching the new refuge they found Sam Perkins and Doctor Fogg at the entrance. The girls had gone to find a part of the cave they could claim as their own quarters. The doctor still felt sore because of the undignified tumble he had taken when Yank first made his appearance, and he spoke arrogantly.

"Well, my good man, I hope you have made all secure," he said.

"Sartain," Yank calmly replied.

"I understand you have had some experience in border ways?"

"Jest an' arton."

"You have important lives in your care, and I hope you will attend to your duty."

"Jes' so."

"You should esteem it a great favor to be admitted to our quarters, and our company."

"I do—I do, by burley, Doctor Fogg."

"Fogg, sir! Fogg is my name!" thundered the irate gentleman.

"Fogg, eh? Are you called so because you're so egregious thin?"

"Sir!"

The doctor threw back his head with what he intended for a withering look, but Nevermiss, who had not shown the least irritation when he heard the late supercilious remarks, good-humoredly added:

"The name applies pooty wal, I must say; but from the way you jumped when you thought I's an Injun, it seems ter me Frog would be still better."

The doctor's face grew very red, but Herkimer tapped him on the shoulder.

"Drop it, Fogg!" the young man sternly di-

rected. "You began this talk, and I will not have our good friend insulted!"

Herkimer walked off with great indignation, while the mountaineer laughed in a low, but hearty way.

"He's an arton upset, but he'll get over it. We'll all be a happy fam'ly 'fore long."

Mollie and Estella were at this point seen returning, and the veteran added:

"You ain't met our young women yet, stranger. Ef you don't mind bein' introduced in the dark, I'll fix it up. Mollie, this is Mr.—Stranger, I'll be consarned ef I ain't forgot your name."

"Gilbert Herkimer."

"Jes' so. Mollie, this is him. Stranger, this is Estella Vance."

Mollie extended her hand frankly, but, greatly to the surprise of all, Herkimer made no effort to take it. Completely ignoring Mollie, he remained looking at Estella in surprise and confusion. What Yank had termed darkness was, really, very dim light, for they stood between the entrance and the fire, but it was sufficient to reveal his mental disturbance.

The withdrawal of Mollie's hand aroused him, and he politely lifted his hat.

"Miss Mollie, I sincerely beg your pardon, but I was—a—I was surprised. Pray excuse my rudeness. Miss Vance, your name is familiar to me, and it may be that mine is to you."

Herkimer spoke in a low, husky voice, and with every evidence of emotion, but, surprised as nearly every one was, a greater surprise was in store for them.

Estella staggered, and as Paradise Sam started to catch her, she fell fainting and unconscious into his arms.

CHAPTER XX.

A GIRL'S SECRET.

"LAND o' Goshen!" ejaculated the mountaineer, in great amazement.

"The young lady is fainting!" added Sam Perkins.

"Bring her after me!" hurriedly directed Mollie.

Paradise Sam needed only one order, and he lifted Estella at once and followed where Mollie led. Yank looked at Herkimer in bewilderment.

"What in burley is the matter?" he asked.

"I don't know," Gilbert replied, in a low voice.

"Did you say you knowed her?"

"I have met the young lady before."

"Why should it agitate her ter see you ag'in?"

"I certainly see no reason why she should faint."

"I hope you'll overlook my follerin' you up so, but were you an' she friends, or not?"

"Friends. I might well answer that we were neither, for I knew her but little; but what there was to our acquaintance was of a very friendly nature."

"Funny!"

"Her illness cannot have been caused by seeing me—I think."

Yank noticed Herkimer's hesitation, and it occurred to him it was a good chance to get information upon one point.

"When did you know her, neighbor?"

"Between one and two years ago."

"She's a pooty gal, is Miss—Land o' Goshen! what is her name?"

"Estella Vance."

"Did you know her frien's?"

Herkimer hesitated perceptibly before he answered.

"She had no near relatives. There were a half-uncle and a half-aunt, or persons bearing some such distant relationship."

"Was their names the same?"

"The uncle was named Warriner Vance; the aunt was his sister."

"Did ye know anybody named Rochester?"

Herkimer started. For a moment he handled his rifle uneasily, and then he answered with some curtiness:

"You will please excuse me from answering. I am not Miss Vance's enemy—of that you can rest assured—but beyond that I have nothing to say. I hope you will not be prejudiced against me, Mr. Yellowbird. I had not the slightest idea that I was to meet the young lady here, and I was taken by surprise. So was she, though," he thoughtfully added, "I really cannot imagine why she should faint. We are thrown together when, I dare say, both of us would wish it otherwise, but I can not see why awkwardness or ill will should result. On my part they certainly shall not, and I shall be ready to defend her to the best of my poor ability, if there is fighting."

His brief exhibition of resentment had passed away, and he spoke with manly frankness that favorably impressed Yank.

"I consait it'll be all right," Yank agreed, absently.

Paradise Sam returned at that moment and cheerfully directed them to have no fear in regard to Estella. Mollie had declared that it was a very simple case, and was working with zeal and skill to bring back the girl's normal condition.

Yank did not take part in the conversation

that followed. Instead, he was meditating on what he had heard. If Herkimer was to be believed—and there seemed no reason to doubt him—Mollie had been wrong when she pronounced Estella and Zoe identical.

Herkimer had recognized Estella, claimed her acquaintance, referred confidently to her relatives and shown familiarity with the family. This appeared to be convincing evidence.

"Seems that Mollie was wrong, an' was deceived by a strong resemblance," thought the veteran, "but some things remain egregious queer. Why did the young woman faint at mere sight of Herkimer? And why did Herkimer refuse ter answer when I asked ef he knowed the Rochester? He says his 'quaintance with Estella was a very simple affair. Land o' Goshen! do gals generally faint under such circumstances? Not much, they don't! Thar's a big mystery, som'ers, an' ef I was a detective, I shoud settle right down ter work an' see what 'twas. I consait it'd be interestin'—anyhow, I'd show up Ames Rochester, an' diskiver his game."

In the mean while, Mollie had been successful in her efforts to resuscitate Estella. The girl came back to life with a tremulous sigh, opened her eyes and looked up intelligently at Mollie.

"You are better," said the latter, cheerfully.

"Better? Yes; but what has happened? Have I been ill?" wonderingly asked Miss Vance.

"You fainted—"

Mollie hesitated, but she had said enough. A look of comprehension suddenly flashed over Estella's face, and then she sprang back with a startled look.

"I remember!" she whispered, feverishly. "I remember all, now. Oh, what shall I do?"

Mollie would have been less than a woman if she had not regarded her companion critically. She had her own opinion in regard to her companion's sudden illness, but her question was innocence personified.

"What shall you do about *what*?"

"About— Oh! I am going away!"

Estella started to her feet, but Mollie stood in front of her in the niche. She practically asked:

"Where are you going?"

"I don't know. Anywhere!" wildly returned Estella.

"Why should you go?"

The question served to bring the girl to practical life. She looked at Mollie with an expression very much like that once to be seen in the dark eyes of Zoe Rochester, and then the unnatural strength of the last few moments deserted her. She sank upon the nearest rock and covered her face with her hands.

"Of course," added Mollie, "it is out of the question for you to leave here. If you went you would fall into the hands of the Sioux, and anything is preferable to that. I really wish you would confide in me."

There was no answer.

"I do not wish to seek your secrets, but if you are in trouble, the help of another woman would be of great use to you, I think; and it is plain to me that Gilbert Herkimer was the cause of your illness."

Estella was silent.

Mollie was thoroughly sympathetic, and she did not wish to worry her companion, or meddle with what did not concern her. The pause was brief; then Estella apologetically observed.

"He did nothing."

The remark was not too vague to be understood.

"Mr. Herkimer seems to be a gentleman," replied Mollie, quietly.

"He is."

The Western girl felt that then, if ever, was the time to question successfully, but she turned her back on temptation and resolved to let Estella follow her own inclinations. If her secret was important she was not likely to tell it, anyway; in any case, it would be indequate to seek reluctant confession.

Silence reigned for several moments, and then Miss Vance uncovered her face. Her expression showed that irresolution was past.

"You must think my conduct very strange," she remarked, in a firm voice. "Pray think leniently of me, if you can. I have heard it said that we all have moments of weakness. Such is the case with me, but my weakness shall appear no more!"

Her tone confirmed the statement, and Mollie knew that confession was then out of the question. The girl of mystery had had time to recover her self-possession, and had done so admirably. There was something a trifle hard and unwomanly in her composure, but Mollie was charitable.

She knew not what motives might exist for Estella's conduct.

"Will you kindly go to our friends," the latter added, "and say that I am quite well? I will join you all, shortly."

"Willingly. If I can help you, let me know."

Mollie walked toward the entrance and found Yank Yellowbird surveying a large pile of plants which had been carefully arranged in a recess. It was the botanical collection of Doctor Fogg, and Yank was regarding the several species with manifest amusement.

"It will be well," explained Herkimer, "to keep an eye upon Fogg, or he may go out at any moment to get his beloved specimens. He is a crank on that subject. Candor compels me to say that I don't believe he has any more practical knowledge of medicine than a cat—if I may speak so disrespectfully. He has a case of medicines, and is always eager to doctor any real or imaginary complaint, but I doubt his practical knowledge. He has a perfect mania for botanical specimens, as this pile proves."

"Botanical specimens means weeds, ef I hav the right idee," returned Nevermiss.

"That is a liberal interpretation," acknowledged Herkimer, smiling.

"Shall have ter talk with Doctor Fogg on the subject," the mountaineer observed. "I know somethin' about weeds, myself, owin' ter the fact that my sister, Arethusa Philinda, once studied the skience. She was a proper ambitious gal, was Arethusa; an' was mortal jealous of our female cousin who writ poetry. Arethusa 'lowed she wa'n't goin' ter git outdone by none o' the Yellowbird fam'ly, nor any one else; an' when she looked 'round fur a subject she could compress her genius onto, she took weeds.

"She bought seventeen books treatin' on the p'int, among 'em bein' 'Crookshank's Brief Book o' Botany,' in seven volumes, which had some egregious fine pictur's in it. Arethusa did powerful sight o' work that summer, an' filled our garret up ter the roof with weeds. She trampled down the grass in the south me'dder like the mischief, an' my brother Amaziah used ter scold a good 'eal when he come to mow thar; but my marm was right proud o' what she called Arethusa's 'love fur the beautiful.' I couldn't see it then, an' can't now, fur I hold that weeds are p'ison mean things, even ef you call 'em botany."

"Poor Arethusa! I always feel melancholy when I think o' her fate. She got so tangled up in them weeds that she lost pooy nigh all her senses. She writ a book called 'Half-Hours in Botany,' but, land o' Goshen! she spent whole weeks, let alone hours, on it. She'd set an' look at them weeds in a way that was te'chin'. She wouldn't stay nowhar but in the attic, an' not a stroke of washin', ironin' or bakin' would she do, which made it mortal hard fur my other seven sisters.

"The last I heerd of Arethusa she was runnin' a weed-farm in Connecticut. No grass, an' nothin' o' that sort on it; nothin' but weeds. An' she was writin' a new book, ter be issued in thirteen volumes, with red covers and green paper. Ef I had a darter, an' she took ter studyin' weeds, I'll be condemned ef I wouldn't disinherit her!"

Yank smote his knee with his hand in righteous indignation, and seemed to feel that there was ample provocation for such strong language.

Paradise Sam had been outside, but he now entered hastily. The mountaineer knew by his expression that something was wrong.

"What's up, Sam'l?" he asked quickly.

"There is danger!" the Pilot answered. "I have seen an Indian outside the cave!"

CHAPTER XXI.

AN INDIAN WALKS IN.

NEVERMISS raised his rifle with a quick but cool motion.

"An Injun outside, eh?" he exclaimed. "This is of int'rest, by hurley! What's he doin'?"

"I saw him by chance," Sam replied, "but only momentarily. He dodged out of sight, and I did not venture to follow."

"Did he see you?"

"Beyond doubt, he saw me before I did him."

"But didn't shoot?"

"No."

"Nor move toward ye?"

"No."

"That was mortal odd."

"I will amend my last answer. He may have moved toward me. I cannot tell, for my view was very brief."

"Prob'lly he was too sharp ter shoot ye. By doin' that he would git one victim, but would stan' no show of findin' our hidin'-place. Did he foller you?"

"I think not; I did my best to prevent it."

"Wal, Sam'l, you an' Gilbert guard the entrance while I look inter this."

"Are you going out?" Mollie asked quickly.

"To be sure."

"Why will you risk your life?"

"Land o' Goshen! I sha'n't. I won't let the atrocious insex tech me—wouldn't do it, nohow. I value myself too much."

"But what good can you do by going out?"

"None, mebbe, little woman; but it's 'cordin' to the rule o' my life ter know what's goin' on. Ef the red critters are so close onto us I want ter know it; if thar is only one, I want ter know it."

"Mountaineer, I read your purpose!"

"Not a 'tall—not a 'tall!" Yank hastily replied. "It's all right. I'll be back d'reckly. Jes' put on the dinner, will ye, fur I begin ter feel an arton embarrassed financially in my stumick!"

The veteran waved his hand and left the cave,

but his parting jest did not serve to put Mollie at ease. She had surmised the reason why he wished to go out. If the prowling Indian was alone, Yank did not intend to have him take the story of his discovery to the other Sioux.

When he had gone a few yards Yank saw that Moses had followed, but this was to be expected. Where his master went the dog went also, and he was as sly as any old trailer.

Indian tactics were at once put in practice. The mountaineer glided forward so stealthily that he seemed to almost lose his individuality and become a part of the rocks and bushes. Each of these he improved, and glided from point to point with a light, quiet step which gave forth no betraying sound. All the while his keen, practiced glance was scouring every other point.

He soon reached the vicinity where Sam Perkins had seen the Indian, but the latter was not visible.

Yank, however, became possessed of the idea that he was near the prowler, and his caution was redoubled. He dropped upon his hands and knees and began to crawl forward in a snake-like fashion, creeping from rock to thicket, and keeping his person screened with wonderful skill.

His gaze finally became fixed upon another thicket, further in advance. One bush in the group was quivering with what seemed more life than was natural, but as Nevermiss watched, its vibrations diminished until it stood as still as the others.

The natural inference was that something of a living nature was in the thicket. Was it the Indian?

Yank lay prostrate, his rifle ready for use, his gaze fixed upon the suspected quarter.

Moses crouched by his side, his teeth grimly visible between his parted lips.

There was a long, striking pause.

Suddenly there was a sound from the other thicket. It was the note of a bird, or something very much like it, and might have led a novice to the conclusion that a bird had stirred the bush. To Yank it conveyed another meaning. He started; he looked puzzled.

The bird-call was repeated.

Instantly the mountaineer's hand rose to his lips; he repeated the note with singular exactness, ending with a peculiar sharpness, as though the call had been broken off prematurely.

Then the bushes trembled even more than before; they parted fully; an Indian stepped out boldly into view.

"Land o' Goshen!" the mountaineer exclaimed.

He sprung to his feet and hurried from his own cover, and the two men advanced quickly toward each other. Yank's face was beaming with pleasure, while the red-man seemed scarcely less interested. They met, and their hands were crossed with a hearty grasp.

"By hurley! is it you, Trail-Lifter?" cried the veteran.

"Nevermiss, your eyes are still good!" replied the Indian in good, hearty English.

"Why, I'd as soon thought o' seein' Tecumseh."

"Or Yank's grandfather?" inquired Trail-Lifter, with unexpected humor.

"To be sure."

"Nevermiss, my heart is glad."

"Mine is fairly boppin'."

"It is many moons since we have met."

"Yes, an' a condemn'd lot o' suns, too."

"I thought I knew the mountaineer's trail."

"Did ye see it?"

"I have spoken."

"Couldn't help knowin' my big, ongainly track, could ye, Trail-Lifter?"

"I have hunted too many days with the great white scout and mountaineer."

"Wal, I should say so! Is thar a kind o' game we ain't hunted together? Remember all the Injun fights we've had? Reck'leek how we've sarved the white scamps at divers times? Remember our campaign at Medicine Springs, when Ben Buckingham was with us? An' how Gold Gauntlet played the fiddle at Dan Cty? An' how the Duke o' Dakota tried ter tan'e the Sioux an' make shoemakers on 'em? An' all the other egregeous scrapes we've had?"

"All this I remember, Nevermiss."

Yank still retained the Indian's hand, and at intervals he gave it a hearty shake. He was delighted, and his companion's natural stoicism was not proof against a similar emotion.

"I see you're still a Sioux, Trail-Lifter."

"For once my white brother is wrong. The Sioux are dogs, and I am their enemy."

The Indian spoke savagely, and his dark eyes glittered as he uttered the words.

"Land o' Goshen! that so? How's that?"

"Look you, Nevermiss, the Sioux liked Trail-Lifter well until he crossed their paths. While he fought for them and had no other thought he was their 'brother,' but when he looked upon Starlight, daughter of Red Buffalo, and would have made her his wife, the Sioux grew bitter at heart. The young men said, 'Look! this warrior whom Starlight would marry is a Modoc! Is it right that one like him should have the fairest maiden of the Sioux nation?'

No! She should wed one of her own race, so let the Modoc stand aside."

Yank thumped his rifle upon the ground.

"I'll bet my last bullet you did not stan' aside, Trail-Lifter!"

The Indian smiled.

"Brother, to the south, many days' journey away, there is a ranch and a house. In the house are Starlight and a boy. They are the wife and son of the bated Modoc! I triumphed over my Sioux rivals, but they did not yield fairly. They tried to kill me—what was the result? On my left arm I have a long, deep scar. Up in the Sioux village two graves tell where the rivals of Trail-Lifter sleep their last sleep!"

"You wu'sted them!" cried Nevermiss. "I might 'a' known you would. It ain't like you ter git beat."

"Nevermiss was my teacher."

"Don't flatter me, Injun, don't! Sech a pupil as you couldn't turn out otherwise. But what in the mischief be your wife an' son doin' on the ranch?"

"It is Trail-Lifter's ranch."

"What! hev you turned farmer?"

"I have spoken."

"You!—the wildest hawk that ever flopped its wings in the mountains!"

"Even a hawk may be tamed, and the eyes of Starlight have tamed the Modoc."

"I'm glad on't, by burley!"

"Nevermiss, we are forgetting one thing."

"What's that?"

"The Sioux."

"They are sev'ral things. Be they near?"

"I need not tell my white brother that the Sioux are on the war-path. Death-Hand leads them, and his heart is bitter toward the whites. Others beside Yank's party are hiding on this mountain, and the Sioux will not let them rest. They are hungry for slaughter, and the mountain will be searched well."

"Looks like an atrocious tribulation!"

"The hare seeks its burrow when the hunters are out. Let Nevermiss be prudent."

"I consait I'll do my best. Do you know a recruit I can git?"

"My brother's words are plain, and they are quickly answered. I came north because I heard that the father of Starlight was ill to death. I saw him placed in his grave, but my old foes had not forgotten me. Again they tried to kill me; again they failed. My work is done, and now I will aid Nevermiss until he and his friends are safe."

"Good! Your arm will be a tower o' strength. I'm pleased clear through, Injun, ter have you again under my banner!"

The compact was made, and after a little more conversation the two ascended to a higher point and took an observation. Harker Drake's party was still to be seen in a state of siege, but no Sioux were visible on the mountain. This did not by any means show that they were not there, for the gulches, defiles and bushes well conceal an army, and Trail-Lifter declared that many men were in Death-Hand's band.

They returned to the cave.

Paradise Sam was at the entrance, and was alone. He was somewhat startled to see an Indian walking forward, but Yank's presence was enough to restrain any hostility. The mountaineer smiled and nodded.

"Sam'l, I'll make ye 'quainted with the whitest-skinned Injun you ever seen. The whiteness don't show, but he's tanned—mortally tanned. He's a Modoc, by birth, an' was a pupil an' chum o' mine eight or ten year ago. We're adopted brothers, be an' I be; an' a better one I never had. Injun, this is Paradise Sam, the Top-Notch Nor'west Pilot. Shake!"

The two men acknowledged his introduction in due form, and Yank added a few words of explanation which made Sam as pleased over the addition as any one.

Just then Doctor Fogg came hurrying up.

"Mr. Yellowbird, I have something important to communicate—"

The doctor stopped short as his gaze fell upon Trail-Lifter, and then he dropped upon his knees.

"I surrender!" he cried, in a panic. "Don't touch me! I never harmed an Indian in my life, and I'll join you and kill white men, if you say so. Only spare my life. I won't hurt you! Quarter, good Sioux, quarter!"

And the eminent man of medicine held up both hands imploringly.

CHAPTER XXII.

HERKIMER HAS A SHOCK.

PARADISE SAM broke into a ringing laugh. Fogg's alarm was as comical to the others as it was serious to him, while the idea of his joining the Sioux, as he offered to do, was the extreme of absurdity.

"This adds about a thousand men to the foe!" the guide exclaimed. "By George! our chances are small. Look out for his scalping-knife, general!"

Yank shook his index finger gravely at the doctor.

"Mister," he observed, "you'll wear the knees

o' yer pantaloons all out. I'd get up, ef I's you. Nobody is goin' ter harm us hyar, my word for it."

Fogg gained an atom of courage, and as his gaze rested upon Trail-Lifter's noble face, he suddenly realized that he was making a great mistake. He arose with all possible agility.

"I—I was taken with a rheumatic twinge, and I fell accidentally," he explained.

"I know how ter pity ye," Nevermiss gravely replied. "I've had the malignant newrolgy in a voy' lent acute form fur goin' on thirty year. Sech things warp a man's narves egregious, an' I should often holler right out of the dignity o' the Yellowbird pedigree wa'n't at stake."

"Neuralgia, eh?" questioned Fogg, with interest.

"Newrolgy, the wu'st way. But did you say you had somethin' ter tell me?"

The doctor had said so, and he had meant it. During Yank's absence something had occurred in the cave, but the most interesting part would have been kept secret had not Fogg by chance overheard what was said.

Estella had remained in the recess which Mollie had playfully termed their "room," but after considerable time devoted to meditation, she called Mollie and asked her if she would request Gilbert Herkimer to come to her.

Mollie obeyed. It flashed upon her that an effort was to be made to silence the young man, and make Estella's secret safer, and though it seemed to Mollie a little hard to ask her aid, she acted with her usual unselfishness.

She delivered the message to Herkimer simply and pleasantly.

He did not receive it in the same mood. He looked annoyed, hesitated, forgot to make any reply, but ended by obeying the call. Near the entrance to the recess he hesitated once more; then walked quickly inside, as though to have it all over at one plunge.

The girl rose, but her position kept the light from her face and hid its expression.

"I have come in answer to your call," he stiffly observed.

"I thank you!"

Her voice faltered as she spoke. He waited for her to go on, but there was a pause before she continued, almost inaudibly:

"I wanted to speak with you."

Herkimer's face assumed a look of surprise as he noticed her emotion, and it increased when he heard her next words.

"May I ask you to have pity upon an unfortunate woman?"

"I don't understand you," he answered.

"I refer to myself—I am the unfortunate woman."

"That may be, but I do not know why; nor do I know why you ask me to have pity upon you. I certainly have never done you injury, or contemplated any."

"I am well aware of that, but the future—"

"What of that?"

"We must be companions for awhile."

"Is my presence obnoxious?"

"You do not understand; don't be angry."

"I certainly do not understand," admitted Herkimer, his brows knitted in a frown. "We met in former days as friends; we never had any trouble; I bear you only good will, and certainly do not know how I could injure you if I would."

"You will soon see a way. The Estella Vance of former days regarded you highly."

"Does that mean that she does not now regard me thus?"

"No. She believes you a chivalrous gentleman who would spare a miserable woman if he could."

Herkimer changed his position uneasily.

"Pardon me, Miss Vance, but I cannot see how the facts bear you out in your attempt to make so much mystery of this. I know only good of you."

"Are you sure?"

"Yes."

"Suppose I convince you otherwise?"

"You can do so only by telling me something which I do not know."

"And what if I tell you that?"

"I see no reason why you should."

"Despite your assertion, I say that you know evil of me already."

Estella was no longer deeply agitated. She spoke in a firm, but quiet voice, though her manner showed the utmost dejection and misery—a fact Herkimer could not in a degree comprehend. He had spoken truthfully when he said he knew nothing but good of Estella Vance, and the prospect of an uncalled for confession did not please him.

The last assertion, however, dumfounded him.

"Am I deranged mentally, or are you?" he demanded, with considerable emphasis.

"I will show you. When we met at the cave-entrance, a few minutes ago, the light was so dim that I am sure neither of us would have recognized the other had not our names been pronounced. Since you joined me in this recess, a few moments ago, I have intentionally stood between you and the light of the torch, so that my face would be in shadow. I had an object in this, but I am about to let you see me dis-

tinctly. You shall see my face in strong light. I will—stand—aside!"

The words were slowly pronounced, and with the same difficulty of articulation noticeable at the beginning of the interview. She had said that she would step to one side, but she was very slow in doing so. Her head drooped; her hands were clasped almost convulsively; and Gilbert Herkimer could see her tremble.

He stood in painful silence, more than ever convinced that she was mentally deranged.

The girl looked up at him at last, and he saw her lips move, but she did not speak.

Silently she stepped to one side.

The light of the torch fell fairly upon her face.

Her gaze still sought Herkimer's face, but it was about as one banished might look to Paradise, and evidence was soon at hand to show her in her right mind. Herkimer improved the increase of light with nothing more than curiosity at first visible, but his mood quickly changed.

He started, and a change swept over his face. He started back, and surprise and consternation seemed to assail him. He brushed his hand across his eyes, but they still told the same story.

"You!—you!" he uttered, in amazement.

"It is I!" faltered the girl.

"But I thought—"

"You have made a mistake, and it was to set you right I sent for you."

"But the introduction—"

"Why do you wonder at that? Can you expect anything more than duplicity and crime from me?" she asked, bitterly.

His face hardened.

"I expected more, once."

"You know the result."

"Only too well!"

Herkimer moved a step further back, as though there was contamination in her presence.

"What are you doing here?" he added, brusquely.

"Following my destiny."

"What is that?"

"It is my destiny to lead a wretched life until death happily sets me free."

An expression of bitter grief crossed Herkimer's face.

"Perhaps it would have been better if the relief had come years ago!"

"I know it would," she admitted.

"I little expected to see you here."

"That is easily believed. You will understand now why I fainted a short time ago. There was no more warning for me than there was for you; the whole truth was flashed upon me without a thing to break its force. I fainted—I wonder I did not die. Gilbert Herkimer, I have called you here to ask a favor. It is not that you will believe me innocent, for I remember our former conversations too well; I know too well how useless it would be for me to try to escape from the net which hemms me in; but one thing I have to humbly ask you."

"Do not use that expression," Gilbert returned, with positive kindness in his voice. "Heaven forbid that I should stand as an accuser, or seek to drag you down! You referred to the chivalry which men should feel for women. I trust I am not a barbarian. What is your request?"

"That you will not tell our present companions I am a woman accused of murder!"

He moved uneasily.

"You choose blunt words."

"I choose plain words."

"Let that be as it may, the promise is made. I should despise myself if I poisoned the minds of these people here against you without cause. I certainly shall not do it. Let us, while necessity makes us companions, go on as we have begun. By that I mean, let us be friendly. No doubt you will prefer to have that friendship passive, but we need not quarrel, show resentment or speak ill of each other. Heaven knows I do not wish to injure you in any way!"

"Thank you; I thought I could rely upon your mercy."

Herkimer made an impatient gesture, was on the point of speaking impetuously, but checked himself.

There was another pause, and then he remarked:

"I cannot imagine what brought you to the West."

"Don't try!" was the weary, hopeless reply. "Rest assured, it was no good; there is nothing about me, or what I do, that is good. Imagine the worst you can, shun me, and then, when we are out of this peril, let me drop out of sight forever!"

CHAPTER XXIII.

A RIFLE-SHOT AND A FALL.

HERKIMER stood in irresolute silence for some time. When he looked at the girl his heart softened, but the memory of the past stood like an object of horror between them. There were the best of reasons why he should not obey the promptings of his kinder nature and announce himself her friend.

He finally bowed gravely.

"I will obey your wishes on most points you have named," he said.

"I trust you will not have to endure my society long," she answered.

"Why will you persist in speaking thus?"

"Speaking how?"

"So disparagingly of yourself."

"Can I speak well of myself?"

"I am not sure but you can."

"Remember the past!"

"Shall I—can I ever forget it?"

"Do your best; it is in all possible kindness that I say, forget all you can. Now let us separate for now. Mollie Dixon, who is the best of girls, will be wondering at our long interview. Thank you, very much, for your kindness, and now let us both take time to harden ourselves for the future—the days we must pass together."

His reply was reluctantly made:

"Your wish is my law."

He turned and left the recess.

This interview, supposed to be private, had been heard in part by Doctor Fogg. He had not designedly acted the listener, but chance placed him near enough to overhear a part of the conversation, and he was not scrupulous enough to refrain from listening.

When all was over he hurried to tell the wonderful tidings to Yank Yellowbird, but it was a confused and distorted story. His mind was not clear enough to retain minor points, but he was excited over one alleged fact.

He asserted that Herkimer and Estella had quarreled; that the former had called the latter a murderer; and that she had not denied the charge. All else was too rambling to amount to anything.

Yank soon discovered that the story was not reliable, but what had been said about Estella being a "murderess" impressed him strongly. It was against her that she had shrouded herself in mystery from the first, and as the mountaineer was not very strongly disposed in her favor, he was all the more ready to believe.

One thing he did do which was to his credit; he outwardly treated the affair as of no consequence. He declared that Herkimer had been jesting, and, though he could not convince Fogg, he disposed of the subject lightly and promptly. He mentally reserved the right to doubt Estella, but he would not have her made the object of general suspicion.

The addition of Trail-Lifter to the party gave confidence to all save the doctor, who could not reconcile his opinion of red-men to the presence of the Modoc in the cave. Nevermiss, however, put all the others in a more resolute mood by telling of the many days when he and the Indian had scouted together.

Careful attention was given to preparations for defense, and after building a breastwork of rocks and earth at the entrance, the interior was fully explored. It was a large, irregular place, but, except the main entrance and a point where a stream of water flowed in and out, no way of egress could be found.

Herkimer and Fogg not only had a good supply of game, but they had brought flour, salt and other articles with them. Add to this the statement that there was ample grass for the horses, and it will be seen that they were in good condition for a siege, if forced to endure one.

By the time all their preparations were completed the afternoon was drawing to an end. No Sioux had been seen, but Yank, Sam and the Modoc were not put off their guard. The latter declared that other fugitives were on the mountain, and trouble must be expected.

As the sun drew near the western horizon, a conference between the leaders resulted in Trail-Lifter going out on a scout.

The other members of the party congregated near the entrance. Estella had made her reappearance, but she was in a very quiet mood. Herkimer addressed her kindly several times, much to Yank's perplexity, but Doctor Fogg saw nothing strange in that. The man of medicine could not get over the shock he had received, and he kept well away from Estella.

Happily, he did not attract her attention by staring at her; he was afraid of her, and was anxious to avoid notice.

The doctor had another idea in his mind, however, and when Yank walked down the cave, he followed.

"Excuse me, Mr. Yellowbird," he said, politely, "but are you feeling the neuralgia now?"

"It's rackin' my system 'atrociously," declared the mountaineer, seriously.

"You ought to do something for it."

"I'd like ter send it on a sea voyage, ef I could stay at home."

"Why not get rid of it entirely?"

"It's lease ain't up."

"Beg pardon."

"What for?"

"I mean, I do not understand."

"Ob! Wal, ye see the egregious newrolgy has got a long lease o' its present quarters, with ten or twenty more years ter run."

"Mr. Yellowbird, I make bold to say I can rid you of this fearful malady."

"That's a fact!"

"It is, indeed. You must know, sir, I am

very skillful in medicine. I am a graduate of the Stebbinstown Critical Medical College, and I have a diploma at home. My success as a practitioner has been great, too. Now, I'd like to treat you professionally."

Yank paused, grounded his rifle, crossed his hands over the muzzle and looked seriously at Fogg.

"What's yer system for newrolgy?" he asked.

"I prescribe my Royal Family Elixir."

"An' the Elixir licks the newrolgy, eh?"

"I am happy to say it does, sir," replied Fogg, with increasing earnestness.

"What's it made on?"

"Sparing you medical terms, I will say that the principal ingredients are quinine, tansy, chamomile, lobelia, leeks, wormwood and Cayenne pepper."

"Does that do the business?"

"Yes."

"Lays the newrolgy right out, eh?"

"It effects a complete cure."

"What becomes o' the man?"

"Beg pardon?"

"Don't do it. All I asked was, which gits the wu'st on't—the man or the ache? Does it drive the ache out o' the man, or the man out o' the ache? Which is likely ter go under fu'st, the newrolgy or the man?"

"Sir, the preparation does not injure the patient," asserted Fogg, with dignity.

"Leaves him just as wal as ever, does it?"

"It restores his youthful agility."

"Must be a mortal good thing, an' I'll talk with ye ag'in 'bout it. Jest now I'm too atrocious busy ter stop ter swaller it, but somethin' must be done ter lay out that newrolgy. I consait I'll have ter order a few dozen bottles on't; the bigger the supply, the more the newrolgy will be discouraged. Mebbe it'll give up its lease, an' move right out o' the tenement. I'll see ye ag'in, doctor!"

The mountaineer walked away chuckling at the idea presented to him.

Fogg went to his botanical collection in great good humor, while Nevermiss soon rejoined the rest of the party near the entrance.

Paradise Sam had been in a position where he could watch, but had seen no evidence of danger.

"Bout time fur Trail-Lifter ter come back," Nevermiss observed.

"Perhaps he has bad trouble," suggested Gilbert.

"Not much, he ain't; no other Injun could beat the Modoc. Put him alone, with nobody ter depend on him, an' I'd risk him ag'in'a tribe of Injuns—yes, or ten tribes, either. He's sharper nor a needle."

Mollie crossed the cave.

"Ef I's you, I wouldn't do that, leetle woman," cautioned Yank. "I don't know as any Sioux is nigh, but, dim as the light is hyar, a sharp-eyed rifleman outside might draw a bead on ye. Better all keep back from the entrance."

"I will obey you after this one time," Mollie returned, lightly, as she started to return.

She had just reached the point of danger when a rifle cracked outside the cave, and the girl started and fell to the ground. Yank sprung to her side with remarkable quickness and raised her head.

"She's shot!" he exclaimed, excitedly. "The Injun has hit her. Oh! little woman, say you ain't hurt!"

His hoarse, frightened voice made him seem wholly unlike himself, but Mollie sprung to her feet.

"Indeed, I am not hurt!" she cried; "that is, not much, I think."

She glanced toward her shoulder, and Yank's gaze, following the same course, discovered a line where the shoulder of the dress had been cut clearly away.

"You're hit!" he continued, in an unsteady voice. "You are hit, but I consait it ain't bad."

He was looking helplessly at the bullet-mark, but Estella acted more practically. Her deft fingers were soon busy, and she announced the result.

"It just touched her, but not enough to draw more than a drop of blood. I am doctor enough for that hurt—come to our room, Mollie!"

Yank Yellowbird's pale face flushed. For the first time in many years his resolution had been shaken, but, convinced that Mollie had received no real injury, his alarm gave place to a desire for vengeance.

"Yes, go!" he directed. "I've got work elsewhere, an' the atrocious insex that fired that shot shall settle with me!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

TRAIL-LIFTER SETTLES IT.

THE mountaineer had seized his rifle, and his face was dark with ill-suppressed emotions as he turned toward the entrance, but Mollie caught his arm.

"You shall not go!" she exclaimed.

"Little woman, I must!" Yank answered.

"The Sioux will shoot you as he shot me, only worse."

"Two kin play at that game."

"Remember he has the advantage."

"He'll lose it condemn'd quick ef I git my eye on him. Don't stop me, gal; that atrocious deed must be accounted for. The red varmint, or the white varmint, that draws bead on you don't git but one chance!"

The veteran was fully himself again. His tall form was drawn to its full height; his eyes flashed; his strong hand grasped the rifle-barrel as though he would crush it; and he shot hostile glances toward the outer world.

"For my sake, don't go!" added Mollie.

"It's fur your sake I want ter go."

He looked out again, but what he saw changed the aspect of affairs. Trail-Lifter was seen advancing.

"Look out, Modoc!" shouted Nevermiss, warningly. "Thar is Sioux about!"

Trail-Lifter made an impassive gesture.

"The slain grizzly is as harmless as the living lamb," he calmly replied.

"How's that?"

"The foolish young warrior has fired his last shot. Trail-Lifter saw him watching the cave, and stole upon him, but he fired too soon. He will never look along rifle-barrel again. The Sioux is a clod, and Nevermiss can rest easy."

"Did ye reely settle him, Modoc?" asked Yank, eagerly.

"I have spoken."

"You've spoke ter good purpose—you have, by hurley! Injun, I thank ye, an' so does Mollie. I kin go out now all safe, fur thar won't be no trouble onless the egregious newrolgy gives me a turn."

The grim, stern look vanished from the speaker's face, and he turned to Mollie with the old, whimsical expression, and his gray eyes twinkling good-humoredly.

There was general relief, and, convinced that the danger was past for a while, Mollie allowed Estella to conduct her to the recess. Yank and the Modoc went out and secreted the body of the Sioux, but they were by no means satisfied with the situation. Trail-Lifter announced that the hostile Indians were thick upon the mountain, and it was easy to see that the shot would attract others to the vicinity.

It might lead to the discovery of the cave.

By the time the two men returned Mollie was back with the rest, and none the worse for her wound. The bullet had cut across the top of her shoulder, leaving a red line, but scarcely a drop of blood had appeared, and Estella had cared for it skillfully.

Yank heard the report, and insisted upon shaking hands with Estella; then, as his pleasure and gratitude were unbounded, decided to shake hands all around, which he did. Moses was the last to be thus favored, but the dog submitted with great gravity and nonchalance.

"Triberlations always will occur," the mountaineer announced, "but I say now, as I've said afore, that no harm kin come on 'em onless they rage voy'lently. They're like measles—only bad when they strike in."

The Modoc had taken position near the breast-work, and was critically watching the limited territory open to his gaze. Yank's exuberant spirits cheered the girls, but every one realized that affairs were not in a satisfactory state.

Half an hour passed; then Trail-Lifter called Yank to his side. They conversed in low voices, but Mollie noticed that their regard was almost constantly outside. Yank finally turned away.

"The Modoc says it's gettin' dark," he remarked, carelessly.

"He says more than that, mountaineer," Mollie replied.

"Eh? How's that?"

"He has seen another Indian!"

"Who tol' ye?" was the innocent inquiry.

"I can read the signs I see."

"No doubt on't, in common cases, but I don't see no Injun now but the Modoc. Ef they was hyar we'd hear their musical yell. Thar's a pile o' music in their screech, Sam'l."

"It's a kind of music I don't like," Sam dryly replied.

"I all'ays took quite a fancy ter music," Yank observed with interest. "I s'pose it was a good'el hereditary, too. My gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, played a fife at the battle o' Bunker Hill, an' my female cousin, the poetess, could git a monstrous amount o' sound out of a pianner. Egregious few could beat her playin' that instrument. Land o' Goshen! you'd oughter see how the cat would skedaddle out o' the room when my cousin put her foot on the hard peddler—that's what they call the consarn that regerlates the voy'lence o' the music. My gran'father couldn't play the fife with his feet, but I've heerd him say he blowed the egregious instrument so he got p'ison red in the face, an' I guess it was so; fur his nose was ruther pink in later days, when I knowed him."

"With sech egg-samples ter guide me I naterally took ter music, an' when I's 'bout eighteen year old, an' the boys 'round our parts got up a band, I didn't turn a deaf ear when the leader come up ter me."

"Do you play any instrument? sez he."

"I play 'em all,' sez I."

"Which is yer favorite? sez he."

"A hand-organ?" sez I.

"We want a man fur the hornet," sez he.

"Is his fangs drawed?" sez I.

"Yellowbird, you're a facetious dog," sez he.

"I'm a wise enough dog not ter meddle with a hornet's fangs," sez I. "I tried it onc't," sez I, "an' my trowsers wa'n't no sort o' protection ag'in' his arguments in favor o' free trade in my gore."

The leader laughed like the mischief, an' explained that I's wholly wrong. He hadn't said "hornet," nohow, but cornet; an' then he took me inter the school-house hall an' introduced me to a brass consarn which looked like a rattle-snake coiled up.

"Blow it!" sez he.

I blowed like burley, but the sound I made was so faint you could skeercely hear it with the naked ear. The leader tol' me practice was needed; an' as we was all beginners, I wa'n't throwed out 'cause I couldn't git no melody at the start. I was give the cornet, an' tol' ter go home an' git inter trim.

Now, a Yellowbird don't like ter git left when he sets out ter do a thing, an' I went at it in dead 'arnest. I hid the consarned crooked thing in the bay-mow, an' ev'ry chance I got, I went out ter the barn an' tried my luck on't. It took a monstrous sight o' lung power ter blow it, an' I nigh about bu'st my cheeks an' strained my eyes out o' their sockets; an' once when I's blowin' away at it I got so red in the face I skeered our brindled calf, an' he broke his halter an' run like all possessed.

Finally I got so I could make considerable noise on the thing, but that only made matters wu'ss. One day I'd been tootin' it pooty considerable, an' when I went inter the house, my marm spoke up.

"I'm afeerd our brindled calf is sick," sez she.

"Be you?" sez I.

"I be," sez she. "He's been bleatin', an' sech a doleful noise I never heerd afore," sez she.

I turned as red as a beet, but didn't say nothin', an' jest then 'long come Parson Jimson. My marm made up her mind immejit. She had a mortal lot o' faith in the parson, an' she lowed he could do as much good ter calves as he could ter other sinners; so she called him in, an' out went him an' her, an' dad an' me. My dad had a good Yellowbird head on him, an' he said the calf was all right, but the parson, he looked at the calf's tongue an' felt o' his ribs an' looked wise.

"I'm afeerd he's a mighty sick, beast," sez he.

"I thought so," sez marm.

"His tongue is coated," sez the parson.

"So it is," sez my marm.

"Nonsense!" sez my dad.

"Don't you contradick the Reverend Mr. Jimson?" sez my marm, sharp-like.

"His pulse is 'way up," sez the parson.

"I knowed it," sez my marm.

The only way ter save him is ter give him bout a pailful of steeped confusion o' peppermint an' lobly tea," sez the parson; "an' do it quick, or that wicked calf will perish in the midst o' his sins," sez he.

Land o' Goshen! I felt bad fur the calf, but I couldn't own up; so he had ter swaller the parson's tea, an' the parson got credit fur savin' him. The tea made the calf mortal sick fur awhile, an' I's so chagrined I went right out, hauled the cornet out o' the bay-mow an' took it home, an' I never tried ter play the thing ag'in.

This don't prove, though, but I like music, but I consait I ain't no call ter furnish it."

The mountaineer had talked with a great show of interest and candor, but, now and then, his gaze wandered to Trail-Lifters' grim figure by the breastwork, and it was plain that he did not forget the practical affairs of life.

The Modoc arose.

"It grows dark in the gulches," said he. "Nevermiss, if you burn a torch here, it will have to be further back from the entrance."

"So it shall be, Injun."

"What have you seen?" asked Mollie.

"Girl with the starry eyes," answered the Indian, looking at her with friendly interest, "whatever the Modoc sees shall not ba'm you."

"I insist upon knowing the truth!" Mollie exclaimed. "I ask nothing unfair; I do ask, though, to know our exact situation."

"Speak out, Modoc!" directed Yank.

The rocks an' bushes of the mountain bave voices to the children of nature," continued Trail-Lifter, with impressive dignity. "The birds read the story of the coming tempest with the instinct given them by the Master of Life. Man is not less observing if his talents are cultivated. There is much to be read, but some things are to be seen. As the Modoc lay by the rocks he saw Sioux warriors outside. Twice they passed within thirty yards of the cave, but the shadows of night were gathering darkly in the rocky paths. The Sioux went on and saw not the barricaded cave."

The Modoc gits right at it," quoth Yank, caressing his sparse beard, "though he don't use jest the words I would. All our speeches is governed by the grammars we use, an' his

grammar was the book o' Natur'. 'Tis a mortal good book, too!"

"If we are to be frank, what are the chances of discovery?" asked Paradise Sam. "Of course, I mean in regard to to-night."

"Wal, it's a toss-up, I consait. Trailin' is now out o' the question, but with them red scamps skulkin' around, nothin' is sartain. 'Twouldn't s'prise me ef they did find us soon. That shot was ag'in' us."

"This don't mean they're coming in here!" declared the Pilot, looking at Mollie.

"Land o' Goshen! I should say not. They can't take our fort by 'sault; that's clean out o' the question. Let 'em try it if they want ter. They'll find our rifles ready, an' you kin bet we'll keep up the glory o' the fam'ly pedigree. Wish my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, was hyar ter help us, an' ter play the fife. He'd blow it so egregiously he'd scare the Injuns out o' their wits. I never regretted more nor now that he died at the 'arly age o' ninety-three."

Trail-Lifter, who had returned to the entrance, suddenly lifted his hand.

"Let there be silence!" he directed. All obeyed, feeling that a crisis was at hand.

CHAPTER XXV.

TREBALL OF FIRE.

NEVERMISS had glided silently to the Modoc's side. He crouched by the breastwork, looking out quietly, but without offering a target to any foe who might be lurking near.

There was a sound of soft footfalls, and two dusky figures appeared only a few feet away. It needed nothing more to show Yank that they were Sioux warriors, but they paused and began to talk.

"We can do no more to-night," said one. "You may give up, but I will not," was the disdainful reply.

"My eyes cannot see in the dark. Can Heavy Knife see the footprints of the pale-faces?"

"Why do you ask idle questions? Heavy Knife does not look for footprints here, but he tells you one thing which you may believe, Swaying Pine; There are pale-faces near!"

"I cannot see them."

"You would not see them if they were at your elbow," retorted Heavy Knife, as disdainfully as before. "Running Wolf is dead—of that I am sure, though we cannot find his body. He died at the hands of the pale-faces, and I tell you they are hiding amoung these rocks, not far away."

"We can find them in the morning."

"I will not wait! Look you, Swaying Pine, I am here to fight. My heart is the heart of a warrior, and I hate the white men. Their scalps shall dangle at my belt, and I care not whether the victim be man, woman or child. Shall I sit down and rest, when I know they are near? Never!"

"Lead on, Heavy Knife!" replied his companion, in a tone of resignation.

They advanced. Their course was directly toward the cave-entrance, and they were soon beside the barricade. The latter had been arranged with great skill, but, as it had been impossible to entirely block up the wide entrance, there was still a gap which could not escape keen eyes.

Heavy Knife paused and looked, his dark eyes glittering snakishly.

There was a significant, anxious pause, but, as is usually the case, there was a fool to do mischief.

Doctor Fogg chanced to be looking in that direction also, having just ended a meditation on some botanical specimen, and his eye-sight was good enough to distinguish the head and shoulders of a man.

Instantly his voice arose shrilly:

"A Sioux!—a Sioux!" he cried.

Hardly had the words passed his lips before he was deeing toward the interior of the cave, but the mischief was done. Yank and Trail-Lifter sprung to their feet, but the Sioux were gone; they had seemed to fade away like phantoms.

The Modoc placed one hand on the top of the barricade, ready to vault over, and looked at the mountaineer, but the latter shook his head.

"I consait it's no use. We couldn't ketch them in the dark, an' thar may be others nigh. Diskivery is bound ter come, an' we may as wal face the music. Ef we went out we might run kerslap inter the atrocious insex."

Trail-Lifter stepped back.

"Nevermiss commands here, but I would like to meet those Sioux dogs!" he said slowly.

"To be sure, an' so would I. I would, by burley! That Heavy Knife I've seen afore. He's the man I was tellin' you about I seen on the prairie below, when I played spy on the Injuns nigh the gully. He's a hot-head, is Heavy Knife; an' jest hungry fur scalps an' sech brac-a-brac. I'd like ter 'commode him with a fight."

"Who knows him better than Trail-Lifter?" asked the Modoc in a deep voice. "Listen, Nevermiss! The worst enemy I had among the Sioux when I sought Starlight was Black Tempest. He was the brother of Heavy Knife, and did not hate me worse than the young fool

you heard talk but a moment ago. What Black Tempest tried to do Heavy Knife aided him in trying—they were both vindictive and cowardly dogs. Black Tempest is dead, but Heavy Knife lives, and he hates the Modoc with all the strength of his black heart."

"I'll bet my rifle it don't scare ye an artom," Yank replied.

"I only ask to meet the Sioux!" was the deep, resolute declaration.

"Now I see it was pooty tough ter keep ye from follerin' him, Injun, an' I'd let ye gone ef I'd known all, but 'tis too late."

"Say no more, my brother. I know the heart of Nevermiss."

"We know each other, I allow."

Yank laid a friendly hand upon the red-man's shoulder, and they looked appreciatingly at each other, but not much time was wasted in idle delay. All was quiet outside, but they knew not how soon the enemy might appear. Mollie, Estella and Doctor Fogg were directed to go to the point where, safe from observation around a double angle, their fire was burning. Luckily, the doctor cared more for botany than girls, and the latter were not afflicted with his presence.

He retired to his collection, and gave no thought to anything else.

The resolute men at the entrance continued their watch. Yank and the Modoc had the front positions, while Sam and Gilbert kept back, but near enough to give their aid if any attack was made. It must be confessed that the latter was not wholly at ease, for Indian-fighting was not in his line, but the Pilot hummed his favorite song in a scarcely audible voice:

"The West, the West, the boundless West!
It is the land for men of sand!
Here Nature greets each happy guest
And grants the object of his quest.
It is the land for men of sand—
The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

"Your contribution is very timely," Herkimer observed, dryly, "but I don't fancy your assertion that Nature gives each person the 'object of his quest.' Are the Sioux to be thus favored? I fancy them already snatching off my precious scalp!"

"By George! I never thought of that!" cried Sam, and then he laughed in his own peculiar, hearty way. "Never mind, general; if you are so unlucky as to lose your hair, no doubt J. A. W. Fogg, M. D., will give you something to grow a fresh crop. Let us hope so. There's nothing like being happy, general! Lord bless you! a contented disposition is better than great riches, and if we must yield up our hair to the grim scalper, let us do it in a cheerful frame of mind. Think of the labor we should save in the way of using a comb!"

"Thar's a good 'eal in that argument," quoth Yank, looking around, "but it ain't wholly sound, Sam'l. My gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, was as bald-headed as a pun'kin, an' in winter he was happy as a clam, but the flies did bother him like burley in summer. He'd set down in his big cheer in hot weather, my gran'father would, an' make me an' my two brothers, Gamaliel an' Shubal—we was his fav'rites—keep the flies off his head. He'd sleep pooty contented, then, but we didn't derive no great amount o' benefit from it."

The quiet composure of his more experienced companions did a good deal to reassure Herkimer, and he found himself actually wishing some excitement would occur.

He was not disappointed.

It was soon shown that the Sioux had been busy, and their activity manifested itself in a striking way.

Everything had been quiet outside, but there was a sudden roaring and a rude bale of blazing hay flashed down past the opening, and striking the ground, blazed up even fiercer than before.

"Down!" exclaimed Yank; "down fur your lives!"

It was a timely warning, though not needed by any one except Herkimer. Yank readily comprehended that danger lurked near the fire. As it could by no means make an impression on the cave, one of two things must be intended. The object was to enable the red-men to take observations, or to decoy the fugitives into sight and furnish a target for Sioux rifles.

Perhaps both these things had been considered.

Yank and Trail-Lifter remained on watch, but they furnished no target.

This contingency had been considered, and loopholes left for observation.

The blazing pile—it was dry, dead grass found in a gulch—made a strong light for a while, but it was short-lived. It burned itself out, died away, and the vicinity was once more enveloped in darkness.

Not a living thing had been seen by the besieged, and the object of the novel procedure remained a problem. That it had been to get clearer idea of their refuge seemed likely.

It was several minutes before Yank relaxed his vigilance. Although he did not expect it, there was a chance that an assault might follow, and he was not the man to be taken off his guard.

Time wore on and the silence remained unbroken. The matter of the blazing bale seemed to have ended as completely as though it had been a meteor flung at the earth from some remote celestial body, but Nevermiss knew the men with whom he had to deal.

He had fought Sioux warriors before the young braves of Death-Hand's party had been born; he had often fought them since. He knew their hostility, their aptness at scheming, and their patience.

He was not to be thrown off his guard. At last he turned and looked at his red ally.

"What's yer idee, Modoc?" he asked.

"Sioux plotting!" was the terse reply.

"Want ter git at us, do they?"

"Ugh!"

"L t 'em come! I'd enjoy a dash on their part—but they ain't likely ter come that way. Trail-Lifter, does your Injun blood give ye any idee?"

"The Sioux are trying to think how to get the best of us; I can tell no more. Mebbe they take one way; mebbe they take another."

"Thar's logic in that, by burley! but it don't give me much light," answered Nevermiss, stroking his beard slowly. "Why the mischief can't the red inex come right forrud an' explain their plan? I'm tired settin' byar an' waitin'!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

WANTED—A DECOY.

At the same time that Yank Yellowbird's party was in such a state of suspense, there was another interesting scene occurring a mile away.

Harker Drake's party had not succumbed to the red foe, but this had not by any means been owing to the fact that they were too strong for the Sioux. From the moment they were besieged at the north ridge they were practically in the hands of the warriors, but circumstances had deferred the final stroke.

There were other fugitives in abundance near at hand, and they were not by any means secure; so it was thought best to look for them, and take Drake's party at their leisure.

Death-Hand, the Sioux leader, was a grim, resolute warrior who rarely lost his head, and, having been educated by the white men at a mission, he united the vices of two races with knowledge few of his companions could boast.

When night drew near he passed the word along that the Drake party should be temporized with no longer. Accordingly, darkness had no sooner come to conceal their movements than the selected Sioux began to congregate near the ridge.

Death-Hand divided them into three parties and gave them their orders. They were to go to designated positions, and at the signal the whites were to be attacked simultaneously on three sides.

This plan was carried out. Inside the rough, unskillful and insufficient breastworks they had thrown up, Drake and his men, who little suspected the number of the enemy, were indulging the fond idea that they were interposing an iron barrier to the Sioux when the storm broke.

Down upon them swooped the red warriors.

Little time was there for preparation. The assailants had crawled as near as possible before revealing themselves, and when secrecy was no longer possible, they bounded forward relentlessly.

The settlers sprung to their posts, and Drake gave the order to fire. It was obeyed as well as possible, but in a scattering way, and the marksmen were both unaccustomed to Indian-fighting and nervous.

The greater part of the bullets went wild.

Shrieks arose from the women as the Sioux bounded over the breastworks, uttering their most chilling cries, and more than one wife and mother was on her knees in prayer.

There was good cause to ask then for divine aid; the other protection vouchsafed the non-combatants was a mockery. True, the settlers stood up bravely, but they went down like chaff. Vastly outnumbered, they were scarcely an obstacle to the impetuous savages. In a few minutes the struggle was over; half the settlers were prisoners, and the other half would meet no more trouble on earth.

It had seemed likely that the massacre of the women and children would follow, but it did not. They were made prisoners, together with the surviving men, and then the whole party were marched across the plain to the mountain. On the way no indignity was offered them, and their hopes arose, but they were doomed to speedy extinction.

Death-Hand, the great chief—so considered by himself, and not without cause—had been wearied by the efforts of the day, and, with his camp made in a gulch, was taking his ease.

The gulch was wide and level, with cliffs at each side. Against the latter fires had been built, and their light made all things distinct in the place. It showed the grim, well-armed Indians, and their appearance was not one to cause pleasurable sensations. Supper had been finished, and little activity was to be seen.

Activity was desired by Death-Hand, however, and he found means of securing it. He

sent word to the prisoners that he wished to know who their leader was. Harker Drake would have denied the dangerous honor gladly, but another man answered for him, and he was led before Death-Hand.

"The chief looked at him critically.

"You shall run the gantlet!" he said, laconically.

Drake, frightened almost out of his wits, protested, but he might as well have talked to the wind. He was led to a certain point and told to make ready. The eager Sioux formed in two lines.

Drake was in a most unhappy mood, and perspiration stood thick upon his person. He did not covet the work before him; on the contrary, it filled him with horror. He had always spoken scornfully of the Indians, but his mood had changed. He recalled the stories he had heard of white men who had been scalped by the savages, or burned at the stake, or killed in running the gantlet.

He had heard how the latter was done, and with the fond hope that if he could get to the end of the double line he would be able to escape, he set his teeth and determined to make a desperate trial.

He received the word to go, and he went.

At the very start it seemed as though the earth was collapsing around him. Blow after blow was rained upon him, and artificial stars began to shoot before his eyes. Every moment he expected to go down, but he never lost sight of the goal.

Freedom was there, but, if he had but known it, it was a thousand miles beyond his reach, as it were.

What was to him a terrible tragedy was great sport to the Indians. They might at any moment have felled him, but it had been arranged that each one in the line should have a blow at the miserable wretch.

They had their fill, and it was not until the end of the line was gained, and freedom really seemed possible, that he was stretched out on the ground. Then the Sioux screeched discordantly, and he was bound, carried back to his companions and flung down, bruised, bleeding, full of pains and miserable beyond description.

Really, he was not dangerously injured, but when his companions heard his lamentations they imagined him near the point of death.

Then a startling message was delivered to them.

A brawny warrior, who had evidently received his instructions in advance, informed them that, in the morning, all the men would be burned at the stake and the women and children massacred.

Next, the same warrior spoke to his followers, and Ames Rochester and Madame Granville were rudely raised to their feet and marched away.

"Mon Dieu!" exclaimed the Frenchwoman, who was pale and trembling, "we are now doomed. Oh! why did I averse leave ze land of my birth?"

"Hush up!" rudely replied Ames.

"But we s'all be killed."

"Looks like it."

"Oh! Mon Dieu!"

Ames was nearly as badly frightened as Madame Granville, but he tried to look calm. They were taken at once to the presence of Death-Hand, and he eyed them critically. Civilization had in no way softened his naturally brutal appearance, but his early education was revealed in his choice of words when he spoke.

"Who are you?" he gruffly asked.

Rochester gave their names very politely, anxious not to offend the red ruler.

"Do you belong in the West?"

"No; we are from the East."

Death-Hand nodded, as though to say that he had thought so.

"The people of the East are wily," he observed.

"Well, I don't know," answered Ames hesitatingly, for he did not know what was coming.

"They seem to be what they are not."

"Really, I don't know. That is—I don't understand what you mean."

"Do you value your life?" asked the Sioux, his fierce gaze dwelling upon the prisoner.

"I certainly do."

"And you, woman?"

"Mon Dieu, sirl!" cried Madame Granville, nervously. "Oh! Mr.—that is— Well, well, I don't know your title, sir. But, oh! won't you let me go?"

"Suppose we take your scalp?"

"Ob! oh!" shrieked the Frenchwoman, and she would have fallen upon her knees in her panic had she not been restrained.

"Do you want to live?"

"Oh! yes!"

"What will you do if we spare you?"

"Anything! Anything, sir! Only let me go, and—"

"You shall have your choice," interrupted Death-Hand, glaring at her as fiercely as ever. "You shall have your choice between two things. I offer you work to do. If you do it faithfully you shall go free—you and this

man," and he motioned toward Rochester. "If you refuse, you shall be burned at the stake!"

Madame Granville nearly dropped.

"What is the work?" she whispered, faintly.

"In a cave up in the mountains is a party of white men and women. They are hard to get at. I want you to go to them as my decoy and ally; go with the pretense of being their friend, but, really, to deliver them into my hands. Will you do it?"

The woman's face brightened and flushed.

"Yes, yes!" she cried.

The chief smiled coldly.

"Woman, your mind is weak," he answered. "I can read your thoughts well; you think that when you get in the cave you can defy me. You are wrong. I shall keep this man"—again he motioned to Rochester—"and if you play me false, he dies!"

Rochester's face became the picture of consternation. He had no faith in the madame's honor, and believed she would rather see him die than to run the least risk herself. He knew her selfish nature well. He made haste to have a word to say, himself.

"But, sir—"

Death-Hand made an imperious gesture.

"Take the man away!" he ordered.

Rochester was rudely dragged out of hearing.

"What do you answer?" continued the chief.

"Who is in ze cave?" asked Madame Granville, thinking of Yank and his party.

"Twenty men and women."

The answer seemed to dispose of her ex-companions.

"I don't see how I can do it," she answered.

"Bab! Listen to me and you shall know!"

CHAPTER XXVII.

A VISITOR, HEAVENLY OR OTHERWISE.

MIDNIGHT had come and gone. There was a very peaceful state of affairs in the cave, all except Yank and Herkimer being asleep. It had been arranged that the reliable men—Fogg was not included in this list—should be divided into two watches.

The first was kept by Yank and Gilbert; the second by Paradise Sam and Trail-Lifter.

By this arrangement the men could go on indefinitely and suffer no inconvenience. They were so hardy that half a night's sleep, together with what they might get in the daytime, would be all that was necessary.

Paradise Sam and the Modoc came forward to relieve their companions; the change was made, and Yank and Gilbert sought their blankets.

Another hour passed.

Trail-Lifter sat on a point of the barricade, watching the scene outside with admirable care and patience. His figure was almost like a statue. He did not speak, and Sam rarely saw him move. His example was followed by the Pilot, though this grim silence was not to the liking of the hearty, buoyant-spirited young white man. For one of his years Sam had seen a good deal of the West, as well as of Indian-fighting, but he preferred the blazing camp-fire, with a chance to tell stories, laugh and roar out his song.

The night was not so dark as at the start. A section of the moon was visible in the heavens, looking pale and dispirited, and skulking behind an occasional miniature cloud as though it felt the necessity of apologizing for its appearance on the scene at all, and this threw out sufficient light to reveal the frowning shapes of rock in front of the entrance.

Paradise Sam was looking out thoughtfully when one of the dark shadows seemed to move. Was it his fancy? The shadow was that of a point of rock, and that it should take an abrupt motion seemed out of the question.

It had not done so. Further moved the shadow, and a human figure was revealed. Sam's hand fell to the hammer of his rifle, but he did not raise it.

A second glance showed him that the unknown was a woman!

Moving quickly she hurried almost directly toward the entrance to the cave, but with great uncertainty of movement. Her head turned from side to side as though she were seeking some particular thing, but knew not just where to look for it.

Trail-Lifter turned his face toward Sam.

"It is a white woman," he said.

"Yes, by George!"

"What does she here?"

"Give it up, general."

"Shall we take her in?"

Sam hesitated. He marked the woman's nervous, frightened air, and could not be blind to the probability that she was a fugitive from the Indians, but some instinct warned him of danger in the near future.

Humanity, however, never appealed in vain to Sam Perkins.

"I suppose we shall have to," he replied, dubiously.

"Speak to her, then!"

It was time for some move if any was to be made, for the woman was then near at hand, and the Pilot raised his voice.

"Hallo, there!"

The woman came to a halt.

"Allow me to ask what you're looking for, madam," added Sam, politely. "Possibly we can aid you."

She then came forward quickly.

"Oh! sir, if you are a white man, I beg you to take me in. I haf escaped from ze Sioux, and my life, it ees in danger. Zere is white men near, as I well know. In Heaven's name, have pity on me, gentlemen!"

She clasped her hands piteously, and her utterance was broken and feverish.

"All right!" Sam coolly answered. "This is the shop where we do business, and we are all white who ain't dark. Accept my hand, madam, and vault over the barricade!"

The fugitive did take his hand, and though her passage over the rocks was clumsy, she was soon in the cave.

"Any more of you?" added the Pilot, heartily.

"Mon Dieu! no; I haf escaped all by myself, and my poor friends are left in ze captivity, or worse. Oh! messieurs, I s'all thank you from ze bottom of my heart for zis!"

"By George!" Sam exclaimed.

"Sir?"

"If it isn't Madame Granville, I'm a liar!"

The Frenchwoman started back in real surprise—then raised her hand to her eyes, endeavoring to recognize the speaker. The darkness was very much against her, but the clew was suddenly found; memory was busy, and though she had heard the Pilot's bluff, full voice but a few times, she recognized him through it now.

"Paradise Sam!" she uttered, in a tone which indicated anything but pleasure.

Her surprise was genuine. When Death-Hand, the Sioux chief, first spoke of a party of whites in the mountain she had thought of Yank and his friends, but the chief's statement that there were "twenty men and women" in the party had seemed to dispose of her ex-companions. Now, she was wholly unprepared for the discovery.

"By George! did you rain down?" Sam demanded.

"Mon Dieu! I knew not that you were here!"

"Whom did you expect? Surely, not the late Bonaparte Napoleon?"

The Pilot was inclined to be sarcastic, but Madame Granville overlooked it.

"Oh! ze terrible time I haf had scence I saw you last!" she exclaimed, clasping her hands tragically.

"What's become of the settlers?"

"Oh! oh! Some are dead; ze rest are prisoners."

"The Sioux got after 'em, eh?"

"My poor heart! yes—oh! yes!"

Sam could not see what her heart had to do with the Sioux versus settler affair, but he refrained from comment. The coming of the Frenchwoman gave him more doubt than pleasure, and he almost wished he had never let her into the cave. She was there, however, and they must make the best of it, but he did not intend to deal with her.

"Stay right here a few seconds," he directed, "until I provide for you."

He went away, while the madame stayed. She addressed a few remarks to Trail-Lifter, and his good English prevented from discovering that he was an Indian.

Sam went at once to Yank and awoke him. The mountaineer opened his eyes in a mood as cool as when he went to sleep.

"No danger, general!" Sam hastened to say, "but we have a visitor, heavenly or otherwise."

"What's that, Sam'l?"

"A visitor."

"Land o' Goshen! what's happened?"

"Madame Granville has walked in."

It was Yank's turn to be surprised, and he did not disguise the fact that he was surprised; but he speedily recovered his self-possession and accompanied the Pilot to the entrance. Madame Granville was still there.

"Good-mornin', marm!" said the mountaineer, genially. "It's a bit 'arly fur a call, an' our house ain't put in order yet, but you're right welcome."

"Oh! Mr. Yellowbird, it is a great relief to see you!" declared the Frenchwoman, rapturously.

"I'm glad ef it 'fecks you favorable—I be, by hurley! The Yellowbirds all aim ter be frien'ly with the females, an' I don't want ter put no blot on the fam'ly pedigree. When I's young I was mortal popular with the gals, ef I do say it, but them days is gone. Glad you called on us, marm. How's your folks?"

"This is a miserable experience," sighed the madame.

"To be sure; but don't let us stan' here. Come back nigh the fire an' let me know how the case stan's."

"Certainly, sir."

The woman was very polite and pleasant, but Yank's heart did not warm to her. He led the way to the fire, lighted a fresh torch and pointed to a seat.

"Settle right down thar, marm. Don't be afraid o' Moses, fur he only bites when he's hungry. Now fur your thrillin' experience."

If she saw any sarcasm in his words she did not betray the fact, but, having taken the designated seat, proceeded to tell what had happened to the settlers and herself. Her account deviated from the truth on no point until near the end; but she did not relate how she and Ames Rochester were called before Death-Hand to listen to a certain proposal.

Possibly she forgot that.

Omitting that important incident she proceeded to tell how she, Rochester and the others, were held prisoners, and how, according to her claim, she finally managed to steal past the Sioux guards. She had heard mention made of a party of whites in a cave, she stated, and as it was but a short distance to go, she had found the cave without trouble, though she had no idea that she knew any of the besieged.

Nevermiss listened patiently, now and then poking the fire, but, as a rule, keeping his gaze on her face.

"You was mortal lucky ter get away," he observed.

"Providence was watching over me with a friendly eye!" declared the madame.

"Does look like it, by hurley! But bo you sure you are out o' danger? What ef the red insextakes this cave?"

"Mon Dieu! can they do that?"

"Not with our leave."

"You are so berave—so heroic—I think zey can not take ze cave."

"Hear it mentioned much among 'em?"

"They say zero was white men here wiz a cave to hide in, but zey know not much about it yet. In ze morning, zey look more."

"I consait so. Wal, we shall be here, an' ef they come pokin' round, we shall know what ter do. By the way, marm, don't you go nigh any outskirts o' the cave. We have general orders ter shoot anybody we see skulkin' round, an' in the dark we couldn't tell friend from foe. Stick right ter the center o' the cave, an' you'll be safe. Thar is a blanket, an' you kin lay down an' take a snooze."

"Sir, I s'all thank you wiz all my heart. Your goodness shall nevaire be forgot—nevaire! nevaire!" the woman earnestly declared.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

YANK HAS HIS SUSPICIONS.

THE mountaineer did not relax his polite attentions until he was quite sure he would leave Madame Granville comfortable, but there was a peculiar expression on his face when he left her and walked toward the entrance.

Paradise Sam and Trail-Lifter were at their post.

"What have you done with your fair friend, general?" asked the pilot.

"I haven't driv her out o' the cave, nor, contrawise, took her to my buzzom," was the grim reply.

"I should hope not. General, she's a dazzer!"

"Anything more?"

"You shall say."

"Sam'l, I want you ter tell me plain jest how she come hyar."

Sam told the story, but Yank interrupted with many questions. Did she walk directly to the entrance? Did she seem to be frightened? Did she appear to have much trouble in finding the place?

"You don't seem satisfied," observed Sam, in conclusion.

"Sam'l, I have my suspicions; I say it freely, I have my suspicions!"

"What is your idea, general?"

"I may be wrong, but it looks egregious queer. This peculiar female was a pris'ner in the Sioux' hands, but they were so stupid, an' she so sharp, she got away. More'n that, she found our quarters. She'd never been hyar, an' didn't know the ground, but jest because she had heerd the red insextakes say a crowd o' whites was in a cave som'ers, she found it easy. Now, consider how mortal rocky an' mixed up things be outside, an' how dark 'tis, an' you'll hev to admit she did oncommon wal ter find us."

"If I follow you correctly, general, you hint at a plot," the Pilot answered.

"To be sure."

"Do you think she has not been a prisoner among the Indians?"

"As ter that I can't say, but I b'lieve a man's head started this idee an' showed her the way. It seems an arton wild ter charge her with bein' an ally o' the Sioux—yes, I'll admit it seems egregious absurd—so I won't stick fur that; but this I will say: That female Frencher is as full o' knavery as she can hold, an' I don't b'lieve she found us by chance. She's twistin' the truth all out o' shape. Now, what's her objick? What's she tryin' ter do?"

"By George! I wish I could tell you, but I can't."

"Trail-Lifter, you' only see'd her for a minute or so, but you've got a good head. What's your idee?"

"Nevermiss, all persons are to be trusted when they are watched," the Modoc gravely answered.

"To be sure—if they are watched sharp enough. Jes' so; I ketch your idee. You don't

take much stock in the Frencher. Wal, she's goin' ter be watched jest as you say, an' she'll be sharp-witted ef she fools us. She will, by hurley!"

Nevermiss did not go to his rest again, but remained with the guards at the entrance. The night was drawing to an end, and it wore out its brief life while they watched. The rocks were closely scrutinized, but no sign of life appeared.

At last the nature of the night changed and the gray light of day appeared as the herald of the sun. Back shrunk the black shadows of cliff and boulder, and the whole gulch before them was open to view. A distant pine tree, visible from their covert, caught the first rays of the sun, and Paradise Sam stirred himself like an awakening lion.

"Yes, pleasures grand on every hand

Adorn the Paradise out West!

It is the land for men of sand—

The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

He sung the clipping from his song with great good humor and Yank announced that he would go and prepare breakfast. Mollie soon joined him, and the work was done by them in union. Madame Granville was near at hand, but she slept through it all.

When the meal was ready the mountaineer volunteered to keep watch, but Trail-Lifter sent him away. Thus it was that all the white members of the party were to eat together.

Estella Vance was the last to appear. She had been restless through the greater part of the night, and Mollie let her sleep as long as she would. She came forward as the others were gathering to partake of the food, a smile on her face which indicated that she was in a more cheerful mood.

"I suppose I ought to apologize for being late," she remarked, lightly, "but I am disposed to throw all the blame upon Mollie. She should have awakened me so I could do my share of the work. I hope—"

She stopped short. Her gaze had fallen upon Madame Granville, and the sight seemed to startle her as much as though she beheld a deadly enemy.

She gazed with parted lips and enlarged eyes.

The Frenchwoman had suffered a surprise, but she quickly recovered. Springing to her feet with extended hands she advanced toward Estella eagerly.

"My dear child!" she cried, rapturously. "Oh! my very dear child! zis is ze grand plaisir of my life! Thank Heaven I see you again!"

Estella stood like a statue while her hands were effusively grasped, but the elder woman was not content with that. She bent to kiss her young companion with as much evidence of joy as though she had been a long-lost sister.

The act was not consummated.

The moment that her intention became clear, Estella released her hands and stepped quickly back, and the Frenchwoman was left in a most ridiculous position, bending forward in the vacant air.

Quickly she assumed an erect position, but a red spot appeared in either cheek, and her eyes glittered snakishly.

Yank was watching closely, and though all his sympathy went to Estella, and against the madame, he was too anxious to pursue his analytical work to interrupt with a word.

Madame Granville pursed her lips ominously; then regained her self-possession and laughed lightly, though far from musically.

"Who would have thought of this meeting?" she cried. "I thought you in ze hands of ze Sioux. Ah me, my heart is glad at zis meeting!"

"Thank you," Estella answered, coldly.

"How you haf escape I s'all hear later, but great is my joy now. But your good cousin, Mistaire Rochester, is in ze hands of ze Indian braves."

The mountaineer looked sharply at Estella, to see how the latter announcement would affect her, but the young lady seemed indifferent alike to Rochester's captivity and the madame's escape.

"We cannot all be fortunate," she observed, somewhat brusquely, and took a seat by Mollie's side, where the Frenchman could not well approach.

All this was duly observed by Yank, and his suspicions increased. Mollie came to the rescue of all parties with a laudable desire to smooth over the rough places and promote peace.

"We are all fortunate to be here," she said, "and I only hope the Sioux will let us remain."

"By George! I should say they ought to, if they were made known of your desires," declared Paradise Sam.

"Will you go as my messenger?"

"I hope you'll excuse me; I may need my hair later."

"Mebbe Doctor Flogg will go," suggested Yank.

"Indeed, sir, indeed I cannot!" hastily answered that gentleman. "I am seriously indisposed this morning, and I do not feel the physical strength necessary to clamber over the dreadful rocks. Otherwise, I should be happy to oblige you. Please remember, however,

that my name is not Flogg, but Fogg—J. A. W. Fogg, M. D. As to the errand, perhaps young Gilbert Herkimer will go."

The innocent doctor was taking it all very seriously, and he motioned in good faith to the gentleman last mentioned, but he had unconsciously thrown another bomb into the camp.

Madame Grauville had choked down her anger and was preparing to eat, but she suddenly fixed her attention on Herkimer.

"What name did I understand?" she asked.

"You are not obliged to understand any name," quickly, rudely, sharply replied the young man.

"His name is Gilbert Herkimer," asserted Fogg, "and he can go out—"

"With your permission, doctor, I'll manage my own affairs!"

Gilbert was in high temper over something, but the Frenchwoman would not let the matter rest.

"Surely, you are not Gilbert Herkimer, of Blackdale," she persisted.

"Surely, it does not make any difference. Am I obliged to give my family history? I think not! If there is no better subject for conversation than my affairs, I think we had better remain silent. I object to being discussed."

Gilbert fired out his words as though he were sending grape and canister into the ranks of an enemy, and wound up by viciously spearing a choice steak with his hunting-knife, while nearly every one present looked in wonder to see a polite, sensible gentleman turned into such a rude companion.

Granville had her opinion, and she tossed her head and gave the opinion utterance in one expressive word:

"Brute!"

Herkimer did not reply, but sulkily devoted his attention to more congenial work.

There might have been an awkward pause, but Yank Yellowbird showed his composure, and his lofty disregard of all things harmonious by mildly observing:

"I've frequently noticed that sech a dry spell as we are havin' is tollered by rain. My brother, Gamaliel Yellowbird, writ an alminax the year he was of age. It worried my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, ter know how Gamaliel would git the weather predictions down right—he feared fur the fam'ly pedigree, my gran'father did—but Gamaliel was ekul ter the emergency. Fu'st he put 'rain,' and then he put 'fair weather,' and he got it right ev'ry time, though he didn't hit the dates proper on all 'casions. His 'stronomical calkerlations was egregious good, though he got in one eclipse too many, an' the tides didn't quite match his figgers. That was the fault o' the tides, though, not his'n, fur he had the ebb an' flow as they oughter been—or 'so he said. He had a mortal lot o' the alminaxes printed, an' fur three years my four brothers, Eliphilet, Hezekiah, Shubal, an' Abiathar did nothin' but peddle 'em."

This statement was made with all of Yank's dry humor, and Sam Perkins laughed his heartiest laugh at its close.

"By George, general," he cried, "I'd be proud to know more of your family! I wish we had them all here now. With a score of Yellowbirds we could put the foe to flight in short order."

"Sam'l," quoth the mountaineer, his face beaming with pleasure, and his index finger leveled at the Pilot in the old way, "thar's a mortal sight o' truth in what you say, an' it should be kep' in mind that I'm the only one 'flicted with newrolgy. The rest o' my brothers are still all as nimble as cats—or was, at last accounts—except Bartholomew an' Micah, who had sech big feet they never could git 'round very spry."

At this moment Moses came rushing toward them with peculiar manifestations well understood by Yank, and the latter arose hastily.

"The Modoc has sent him, an' I consait thar is some atrocious triberlation!" the veteran declared.

He was not long in getting to the entrance, where Trail-Lifter was alertly watching.

"What's up, Injun?" Nevermiss demanded.

"The Sioux are in the gulch, and I thought Yank would like to be here."

"Jes' so, by hurley! On the stir ag'in, be they? Some new mischief afoot. 'Twouldn't s'prise me ef they made an attact!"

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE SHOWER OF ROCKS.

YANK crouched behind the barricade and looked out through one of the loop-holes.

"Look by the two big bowlders!" Trail-Lifter directed.

"To be sure. I don't see anything now, but I dare say—Yes, yes, Modoc; I see!"

A dusky face was raised to view, and the mountaineer's fingers mechanically sought the hammer of his rifle. It was a good target, and if he had brought his deadly rifle to bear, the number of the Sioux would have been decreased one.

"Nevermiss, does the Sioux dog think we are children, or why does he give us such a plain view?"

"Mebbe the varmint wants ter draw our fire."

"Shall I fire?"

"Not yet, Modoc. One man less wouldn't help us much, I consait, an' it ain't of any use ter open bloodshed. Ef they want ter make a charge, they will find us ter home an' our rifles loaded."

The dusky face had disappeared, after some time devoted to surveying the cave, but there was a motion in the bushes beyond, and the rattle of a stone to the left. The two determined defenders consulted, and ended by calling every man to the barricade.

The signs went to indicate that an attack was to be made at once.

The females were kept back, though Mollie announced that if firing began, she should insist upon giving what help she could, and she could certainly reload the empty rifles. Estella and Madame Granville were not in such a brave mood. In fact, the latter was quite panic-stricken, but as firing did not begin at once, she summoned up a degree of courage and edged up to Estella. She spoke in a whisper, but the tone was as penetrating as whispers frequently are, and Mollie overheard her.

"I want to tell you, miss," said she, vindictively, "that I highly disapprove of your conduct."

"What is it now?" Estella returned, coldly.

"You received me in a way zat was insolting."

"Would you have me act the hypocrite?"

"I would have you be civil."

"We can't have all we want in this world."

"We will see about zis later. It would not surprise me eef you begged my pardon yet, but we will let it rest. I want to speak of zat young man—of Gilbert Herkimer. Vat does he here?"

"You will have to ask him."

The Frenchwoman clinched her hands.

"Mon Dieu! did you not hear me ask him? And did you not hear his insolting words?"

"Perhaps he did not choose to have you embrace him—in other words, be his friend."

"His friend! I could strike him dead!" hissed the madame. "Zat is not to ze point, though. What I ask you is, why is he here? Have you and he made up? Has he come West to find a lady-love, and found one? Ah! ah!—it seems suspicious, very suspicious!"

"Madame," retorted Estella, warmly, "I advise you to think only of what concerns you!"

"Mon Dieu! and does not this concern me? Are you going to disappoint all ze high hopes formed by Ames Rochester and me? Are we to lose all we have tried for? Perish ze thought!—we will not lose! If ze young man is getting ze old glamour in his mind, I shall tell Meestaire Rochester."

"Why not tell him at once?"

"Ah! ah! is he not in ze hands of ze Sioux?"

"You make a great mistake, anyhow. Gilbert Herkimer and I met by the merest chance, and there is no 'glamour' upon him. Do you think him weak-minded?"

"I wish he was!" declared the madame. "If he is not wiz se glamour, he is all ze more dangerous. He either loves or hates you, mees. Ah! ah! what damage might he not do if he would!"

The speaker held up both hands in dismay, and clinched her argument by earnestly adding:

"Yes, yes!"

"Let him if he will!" retorted Estella.

"Are you mad?"

"I wonder I am not; but let us drop the subject right here. I will not say any more about it!"

Estella walked resolutely away, and Granville, after shaking her head mournfully, walked to join Doctor Fogg, who, not being considered a fighting man, had been left to meditate on his botanical specimens.

All this conversation had been overheard by Mollie. She had not intentionally acted the listener, but had either to hear or walk out of the recess. She remembered the peculiar standing of the two women in the party, and thought that she was justified in hearing what she could.

She had heard, and it had added to her perplexity and doubts.

That there was a deep scheme of some sort afoot was clear, and Gilbert Herkimer appeared an obstacle to its successful consummation. It seemed that he possessed information which, if he saw fit to speak out, would upset all of the plotters' plans.

Mollie recalled the assertion of Doctor Fogg that he had heard Herkimer accuse Estella of being a murderer, and for a moment she felt that the society of the girl was not to be coveted, but, as usual, she ended by rejecting this evidence and thinking well of Estella, in spite of all.

If she had known the truth in regard to the speech Fogg had so perverted—if she had known that Estella had voluntarily referred to herself as a woman accused of murder—her faith might not have been so strong.

Mollie walked toward the entrance just in time to witness the beginning of a new experience.

Without warning a large, dark object suddenly

flashed down before the open space. It struck the ground and a cloud of dust arose. Mollie's first idea was that an Indian had fallen, though a moment's thought would have shown that the object was not large enough for that; but Yank quickly freed her from this theory.

"They're skulkin' above!" observed the veteran. "They got that stone loose, somehow, an' it tumbled down. They're still actyve."

The last word had scarcely been spoken when a second rock crashed on the ground, and fast after it came others, shooting past the open space like huge birds on wing. Soon, however, nothing could be seen for the dust that arose—it obscured everything near the entrance.

"Stand ter yer places!" Yank shouted. "Tbar is some atrocious plot back o' this—they may hop inter view any minute."

"I pity the man who gets under those rocks!" Sam shouted back, with a laugh as cheerful as ever.

No man did get under, but the shower of rocks continued. Soon the ground was covered and but little dust arose, but the bowlders came crashing down upon each other with an ominous sound.

All of the defenders were puzzled to know what it meant. A pile was rising which would soon block the entrance entirely, but what could the object be? Why should the Sioux wish to wall them in? The red warriors were out, not merely to slay, but to secure scalps and have the pleasure of seeing the hated whites die. It would be but little satisfaction to such active fellows to pen up a party of whites whose numbers were insignificant, and let them die like rats in a hole when it seemed easy to kill them in the ordinary way.

Yet, such seemed to be their present purpose.

Yank and his friends remained ready for fighting, but no foe appeared. The rocks crashed down steadily, until the broad pile arose to stand above the entrance. Then the last ray of daylight disappeared, as did all view of the outer world.

They were walled in!

The stones ceased to fall.

Yank Yellowbird's voice arose in a cheerful tone.

"I must say this is interestin', an' it reminds me of a circumstance left in the hist'ry of the Yellowbird pedigree writ by my two ancestors, Moses an' Noah. It does seem egregious odd, but it was recorded by them, good an' reliable men, that in their day thar was a mortal big shower o' frogs an' toads, one or both, but I ain't sure whic'h. This ain't no circumstance to that!"

"Oh! oh! we shall perish!" cried the voice of Madame Granville, wildly.

"You thar, marm?"

"Unhappy me! I am here!"

"How d'y'e like our hotel?"

"Mon Dieu! we shall all perish!"

"Not afore our time comes. Modoc, d'y'e understand' this affair?"

"Sioux trick!" was the terse reply.

"What's the objick?"

"Don't know; we find out bimeby."

Yank caressed his beard thoughtfully.

"Jes' what I'm afeard on," he replied. "I don't objeck ter bein' buried alive, fur sech things was common in old times, but ef it's done I want good reasons give for it, by hurley!"

"Perhaps it's the fashion out here," added Sam Perkins, observing Madame Granville's trepidation with real pleasure. "No one who was buried alive ever objected to it, so far as I know, and whatever is the style we'll take in."

"It is the land for men of sand—
The wild, the free, the boundless West."

"Brute!" cried the Frenchwoman, "how can you sing now! I s'all die here!"

She wrung her hands and exhibited terror and dismay as marked as it was to all appearances sincere.

"Egregious funny!" muttered Nevermiss, absently.

"Mountaineer!" said the Modoc suddenly, "watch here. I will go on a scout."

"Go with him, Sam'l."

Yank had readily caught Trail-Lifter's idea. It was possible that the red warriors knew of a way into the cave not known to the defenders, and that the demonstration at the main entrance had been made to cover operations elsewhere.

The Modoc and Sam went away, while Yank again directed his gaze toward the Frenchwoman. She had sunk down and, with her face covered with her hands, was sobbing bitterly, evidently panic-stricken.

"Egregious funny!" the mountaineer repeated.

"I can't get the idee out o' my mind that things ain't goin' jest as the Frencher expected."

CHAPTER XXX.

A MODERN DELUGE.

TRAIL-LIFTER and Sam returned from their tour of investigation without having made any new discovery. There was nothing to show that the Sioux were endeavoring to effect an entrance elsewhere, though the Modoc had paid particular attention to the stream of water

which, as has been mentioned, flowed through the cave.

At its point of exit it went down a sharp incline at speed which lashed the water to a frothy mass on the pointed rocks, and there was no danger there, but Trail-Lifter was not so sure of the place of entrance. There the water came in far more quietly, and he was not sure but men could go through the tunnel.

He had penetrated several feet into this avenue—and a dark, pokerish place it was—but it appeared to be a subterranean stream in the full sense of the word, and he and Sam returned to their companions.

Everything remained quiet outside, and the fallen rocks blocked the former portal, but Yank had produced a torch, so they need not be in total darkness.

"I'd like to know what the Sioux are doing," remarked Herkimer, after the report was made.

"We'll establish a bureau of information hyar, arter we git settled," Yank soberly promised. "I've often thought sech ought ter be run in Injun wars, an' I think so now. I tell ye, Modoc, thar ain't no fun in bein' a borderman when the hostiles is out an' offerin' bounty-money fur sculps!"

"Nevermiss is right," Trail-Lifter gravely replied.

"It wa'n't anything but a slip that made a borderman on me, anyhow," added Nevermiss. "I was brung up fur another callin', an' gi'n enough p'ints ter have got anybody else through but luck was dead ag'in' me."

"You see, my gran'father, the Revolutionary relict, 'lowed from the fu'st that I was cut out fur a sojer. He had fit at Bunker Hill, an' he thought he seen similar p'ints in me. It was a fack that I got inter a mortal lot o' other skirmishes with other boys, an' as I dassent let 'em lick me fur fear they would lick me too much, I always got the best on 'em."

"Wal, my gran'father took me in charge, 'arly, an' teached me the main p'ints o' the business, an' nobody ever had a thorough puttin' through than I did. My gran'father was egre-gious set on correck tick-tacks, an' the way he made me go it was amazin'. We drilled ev'ry day, an' he got a feller who had the right ter do it ter promise me free intermission to the military hospital, whar I could git a license ter go out an' kill my enemies when I seen fit—West P'int, I b'lieve they call the diplomer 'stablishment."

"The day afore we was ter go, my gran'father sez ter me:

"'Yank,' sez he, 'we'll go out an' have one more trainin',' sez he.

"'Spose we have a variation,' sez I.

"'How's that?' sez he.

"'Previous,' sez I, 'you hev always be'n the captain, an' I've be'n the private, an' you've made me hustle 'round like the mischief. Le's change places, 'sez I; 'I'll be cap'n, an' you be the private.'

"'Some other time,' sez he, flustered-like.

"'No time like the present,' sez I.

"'Why do you wish this?' sez he.

"'I want ter see your tick-tacks tried on yerself,' sez I.

"'Why so?' sez he.

"'I doubt ef you foller the c'reck rools,' sez I. 'When you's at Bunker Hill,' sez I, 'did yer cap'n hit yer 'cross the knees ter straighten yer legs?'

"'My legs was straight,' sez he.

"'Did the cap'n tie yer head back ter keep it up?' sez I, growing warm.

"'I held my head up,' sez he, sternly.

"'Did the cap'n take ye over his knee an' use up a board on yer raiment, an' then call it tick-tacks?'

"'Not much, he didn't!' sez the old gentleman. "What!" sez he, "would Nehemiah Issacher Yellowbird 'low that from any man? I guess not!" sez my gran'father; "I'd have thrashed him like the mischief!"

"'Then,' sez I, "it's clear ter me thar is somethin' wrong 'bout your system o' tick-tacks. All these things have you done ter me, an' I'm a Yellowbird, too. I didn't think,' sez I, 'you would openly misuse yer own gran'son, an' give him wrong tick-tacks. I don't reckon I want ter be a sojer, anyhow,' sez I, warmin' ter my subjeck. 'No wonder soldiers die young,' sez I, 'ef they have ter be licked like hurley. Look at them welts,' sez I, rollin' up my trowsers-legs. 'Thar is whar the tick-tacks have broke out,' sez I. 'The birch stick you used wa'n't good fur my blood, an' I consait bullets would be even wu'ss. Don't think I'll be a sojer; I resign,' sez I.

"'Remember you're a Yellowbird,' sez my gran'father, with a frown.

"'I do, an' that's what's the matter,' sez I. "It's ali wal enough ter fool 'round at Bunker Hill, play the fife an' fire a few bullets; but when it comes ter bein' thrashed like hurley, with a stick, thar ain't no fun in the tick-tacks. I throw 'em up,' sez I; 'I'm goin' ter be a fish peduler!'

"I knewed my gran'father would be mad as the very mischief at that, so I took ter my heels an' run. Thar was a coldness 'twixt me an' the old gentleman fur some time, an' I lost my mil'-tary show. He took my brother, Issachar

Peregrine, an' made him train, an' turned him out a full-blown sojer. He'd b'en a general fore now, too, only he was stationed in a hospital as a nurse, an' thar was so much jealousy an' contention, an' so little tick-tacks thar, that Issachar only riz ter be a drum-major—I b'lieve that was his title, though I am't overly sure. Anyhow, Issachar held up the fam'ly pedigree mortal wal."

Paradise Sam struck his hand heavily upon his knee.

"I'd given one-half my inheritance to have known your grandfather and brothers—I would, by George, general! They were remarkable men, like all the Yellowbirds I have met!"

Nevermiss's honest face beamed with pleasure.

"Thank ye hearty, Sam'l. Beset as I be with the voy'leant newrolgy I ain't o' much account, mebbe, but the rest o' the Yellowbirds was uncommon men. My earliest recorded ancestor, Adam, who lived at the Garden o' Eden, was the smartest scholar in his class, an' never met a boy who could throw him at wrastlin'. He's uncommon pop'lar 'mongst the fair seek, too, an' was able ter take his pick among the gals. He chose Eve Smith, an' their parson paid her the compliment o' keepin' the neatest house of all his flock."

Yank had got fairly started on his favorite subject, and he told stories and alleged facts concerning the Yellowbirds without limit.

The day passed on without any change in the situation. The defenders were not disposed to open the portal, though the size of rocks which formed the barricade was not such as to render it difficult; and nothing was heard from the Indians.

The mountaineer's good humor put nearly every one in corresponding spirits, but he was by no means at ease. He could not reconcile himself to the belief that the Sioux would be content to have them starve in the cave, and he made frequent trips around the subterranean refuge to make sure that they were not breaking in.

Herkimer's watch showed that the afternoon was nearing an end, when Yank arose and went on one of these trips. As usual, Moses followed him, but they went forward without discovery until the stream was reached.

Previously, Nevermiss had been accustomed to step upon a certain stone and spring across to the further side, but when he now looked, he failed to discover it. He held his torch lower—the stone was not there.

This was all the more surprising because the rock had seemed very firm and immovable.

He looked more critically, and the meaning of the fact flashed upon him. The water had risen perceptibly in the stream!

A shade of uneasiness passed over his bronzed face, and he hurried to the lower side of the cave, where the stream found egress. One glance there was enough to increase his troubled expression. Where once the inclined plane had been visible, with the stream frothing over it, was only a pool of water.

The stream was no longer escaping through the lower tunnel, but was setting back and accumulating water in the cave.

"Land o' Goshen!" the mountaineer involuntarily exclaimed, as he quickly put down his rifle. "Hyar's an atrocious tribulation under way!"

He bent over the pool and, grasping the stones within reach, essayed to move them. His judgment told him at the start that this was a futile attempt, and so it proved. He was still kneeling there when Paradise Sam approached.

"What's up, general?" the Pilot asked.

"The water is comin' up, p'ison fast. D'yee see, Sam'l? This waste-way is all blocked up tight, an' I reckon not a drop o' the fluid kin get out."

"By George! that's bad!"

"Bad! Why, Sam'l, it'll flood the cave!"

"Can't we start it again?"

"Don't know how we can. This hole is ten foot deep, an' even ef we could work down thar, we might not be able ter find the stoppage. It may be fifty foot away, an' we—"

The speaker stopped short, hesitated, and then turned a troubled face toward his companion.

"Say, Sam'l, what's stopped the water, anyhow?"

The Pilot caught the idea at once.

"Great Cæsar! have the Sioux done it?"

The mountaineer rose to his feet.

"You can safely bet they have! They've got at the brook at the p'int whar it flows out inter the world, an' stopped it so it can't flow out any more. That's whar the trouble is, an' we can't get at it ter remove the obstruction."

"But see here, general!—this cave will be transformed into a lake. We'll be drowned out!"

The men looked at each other in a deeply troubled way, for they well realized that the life of every member of the party was in danger.

"Foller me!" Yank then exclaimed abruptly.

He hurried to the point where the water came in and gazed at the upper tunnel eagerly. His

expression was not hopeful, for his judgment told him there was no good cause for hope, and it needed but a short survey to show that he had judged correctly.

With the means at their disposal it was simply impossible to stop the entrance of the water. Nothing less than a dozen men with spades could have checked the stream, and they had nothing to work with in that line, nor any other way to block the passage.

In the mean while, the water continued to rise.

"You said well, general," observed Sam, "when you prophesied that the red demons were not idle."

"Long heads, they've got."

Nevermiss answered mechanically, and was thoughtfully surveying the foundation of the cave.

For awhile the channel would hold the accumulation of water safely. When it overflowed the banks, all would go toward the front end of the cave—or toward the barricaded gulch entrance. This part was much lower than the back. The last portion to be flooded would be the rear, but to take refuge there would be only to defer the inevitable, and to die, at last, like rats drowned in a trap.

The Sioux's motive in blocking the main entrance now became plain. If, as was probable, earth had been added to the rocks cast down there, no water could escape. The death-trap was rendered perfect—yet Yank doubted if the enemy expected, or hoped, them to remain and suffer such a fate.

More likely they were expected to retreat from the deluge, remove the barricade and go out, and then the Sioux could butcher or capture them, as they chose.

The plot was elaborate, and it seemed sure.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE SUBTERRANEAN WAY.

WHEN the unpleasant fact that the entrance of water could not be stopped was fully accepted, Yank and Sam decided to make the situation known to their companions. Death by drowning was yet some hours away, but it would be useless to bide the peril; besides, it occurred to the mountaineer that if they made a bold stroke for freedom, it had better be made at once.

Naturally, the Sioux would expect them to defer action as long as possible, and there was one small chance in a field of many adverse ones that if they broke through the barrier at the portal, at once, some of them might escape.

The two men walked back to their companions and made the truth known.

It was a startling revelation, and was received in various ways. Trail-Lifter's nostrils dilated, but his noble face remained stoical; Herkimer smiled bitterly, as though life was not a prize worth keeping, to him; Mollie and Estelle changed color but remained firm; Fogg was too much frightened to utter a word; while Madame Granville fell upon her knees in abject fear and, raising her clasped hands, called first upon her companions, and then upon the Providence whose beneficence she had outraged in the past, to save her life.

Yank gave them little time for idle talk.

"Le's come right ter the p'int, neighbors," he said, deliberately. "We want ter talk this over. What's ter be done?"

No one answered.

"Ef anybody's got an idee I'd like ter hear it."

No idea was advanced.

"I allow I can't see but two ways ahead on us. One is ter stay hyar an' give up the battle—which is condemn'dly ag'in' the Yellowbird principles—an' t'other is ter open the gate, go out arter dark—it's arter dark now, I consait—an' fight like the mischief. Le's hear your views, neighbors."

"Nevermiss is wise," laconically observed the Modoc.

This was the only ready response, but the ice was broken, and a discussion followed in which the four reliable men of the party took share.

All agreed that it was better to go out and die like men than to perish idly.

"Now fur the feminines' votes," added the mountaineer. "Mollie, what's your idee?"

He stopped short. Mollie was not in her place, but before he could ask any question, he saw her coming down the cave with a torch in her hand.

"Jest in time, little woman," he said. "We want you ter vote."

"Thank you, I will, friend Nevermiss."

"Wal, shall we go out or stay in?"

"Go out," Mollie replied, firmly, "but not through the main entrance. I have been doing a little exploring, and I'll give you my plan. We've got to take a desperate risk, anyhow, and I move that we take it by trying to follow the subterranean passage backward—I mean the tunnel through which the stream enters."

Yank showed prompt interest.

"But it's all blocked up by the water that has cumulated o' late," he replied.

"Dig through the wall of the channel inside the cave, and let the water flow this way."

The veteran's eyes suddenly glittered.

"What'll we dig with, gal?"

"Knives, flat rocks, sticks gathered for fuel—anything to break through the earth that banks in the superfluous water. Once make the way open, and all the water can be sent this way, and only the constantly arriving water will block our way up the tunnel."

Mollie spoke rapidly, and excitement brought unusual color to her face. She looked so pretty that Sam Perkins felt like clasping her in his arms, and Yank sprung to his feet and waved his old fur cap in a wild whirlwind of admiration.

"Do you hear the leetle woman?" he cried. "Do you hear her? Land o' Goshen! I don't see no reason why we should git drownded like the Hottentots in the Red Sea. Wehev the head of a Napoleon here, and it's a mortal pooty head, too. It is, by burley!"

"Right you are, general," coincided Paradise Sam, in his loudest, heartiest tones. "Right you are, by George!"

"Now don't be absurd," retorted Mollie, and she proved her courage by smiling upon her two admirers. "I know, and you know, that we can't rely upon the tunnel, for where it will lead us no human being of our party can say, but we cannot lose anything by trying."

"You speak to the p'int, as you always do, Mollie, an', by hurley! we'll git ter work at once. Rally, men, an' le's drain off that water quicker than a painter's jump for game when he's hungry. Come on!"

The mountaineer led the way, and every man was soon busy. For once Doctor Fogg came into use. He could not fight Indians, but, with his life at stake, he could dig as valiantly as any animal that ever burrowed in the earth. It was a lively scene, and the left-hand bank of the channel was attacked in a resolute manner.

The task promised to be long and hard, but an agreeable surprise awaited them. When they had removed about twelve inches of earth from the top what remained was seen to be of mixed gravel and sand—brought in, no doubt, by the stream, itself, at some previous period—and this was flung aside.

Bravely the new channel progressed, and when it had reached proper dimensions the lost crust next to the water was broken and the stream let in.

It flowed promptly, and went coursing down toward the gulch-entrance.

As the way to the tunnel would soon be open, preparations were made for departure. The horses would have to be abandoned. This was an unpleasant certainty which was not to be got around, and it seemed like sure death for them. The inevitable must be accepted, however, and, fortunately, none of the animals possessed unusual value.

There was little else to leave—except Fogg's botanical specimens—but had the latter been nuggets of gold the simple-minded man would not have grieved half so much.

Yank found opportunity to speak with Mollie privately.

"Little woman," he said, earnestly, "I want you ter keep with Paradise Sam all the time. I hope fur the best, but thar is no knowin' what tribulations we'll have; an' in case sech comes, Sam'l is the man ter rely on. He has a right strong young arm, and a heart like a lion fur bravery, Sam'l has."

"But, mountaineer," asserted the girl, softly, "why should I take the best follower you have?"

"Because you deserve it, because your life is the most precious of all. What is our lives compared ter yours? Who else hyar is so bright, so cheerful, so pooty an' so good?"

Nevermiss spoke with visible emotion, and his usually steady voice trembled.

"Mollie," he went on, "you'll excuse a rough old borderman, but ef I was asked ter name the one bright treasure in the world, I'd say it was you. Of course you understand, little woman—it ain't the likin' of a young man I feel fur ye, fur I was past my thirtieth year afore you seen the light o' day first, but I'm mortal fond o' my mountain ward. You call up mem'ries in my heart, Mollie, that ain't been so vivid fur a long time. Twas so the first time I seen ye, an' it's been growin' on me eversence. I said you was the brightest, the pootiestan' the best, an' I say so now. We don't none of us know what the night will bring forth, an' though I consait the Master o' Life will be kind ter them who serve Him wal, I hope ef rough Yank Yellowbird should go under, you won't forget him."

The mountaineer leaned heavily upon his rifle; his gaze sought Mollie's face with eager attention, as an idolater might look at the object of his adoration; his voice was husky and full of emotion; and all his old calm, whimsical manner had given place to an intensity of feeling which was remarkable.

Mollie's eyes were dim with sudden tears, and she clasped one of his big, brown hands within both her own.

"Nevermiss," she softly replied, "in one way at least you are well named. You did not miss having one good or noble quality as your birth-right. All are yours! As for me, my confidence, my admiration, my affection are alike given you. Your goodness is beyond power of

description. I thank you many times for your regard for me; I am proud to possess it, and if anything should happen to you, I shall remember you as the best of men—but I feel sure we shall all escape safely."

He drew his tall form erect.

"We shall, ef human skill kin manage it, an' in the Modoc an' Sam'l I shall have good helpers."

"All is ready," answered the Pilot, approaching.

"Then we'll go, Sam'l."

"We're off on a romantic trip, and I dare say we'll have lots of fun, general. This is a new phase of life in this glorious country."

"It is the land for men of sand—

The wild, the free, the boundless West?"

"General, all we need now is a few of the other Yellowbirds along—say half a dozen of your brothers."

"Sam'l, you're right, but we'll make up fur lack o' numbers with puusonal bravery. We'll use a mortal sight o' tick-tacks, too. They'll come in handy, though my gran'father's fife wouldn't suit the 'casion at all. Pilot, you won't forgit what I tol' ye 'bout lookin' out fur Mollie?"

"I'll do my level best, general!" declared the young man, heartily.

"All right—we'll be off. Come on, neighbors! Moses an' I'll lead the way, an' we'll lead ye ter a land o' promise as Noah Yellowbird did the children o' Israel. Don't be afeard; I consait it'll all come out right!"

The mountaineer was again himself. His wonderful coolness and his odd conceits had returned, and he had never been more erect and resolute.

With a firm step he walked to the tunnel, and in a moment more his feet and those of the dog splashed in the water which flowed down steadily.

The others followed, and in a few moments the last had entered the subterranean way. The forlorn hope—the last resort—was begun.

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE CASE BECOMES CRITICAL.

As long as he could conveniently do so Yank sent back cheerful words to even the remotest of his companions, but his real opinion did not by any means harmonize with his outward confidence. The chances were that the passage would gradually become smaller until progress was impossible.

All this he realized, but he kept his doubts to himself and labored on, hopeful if not confident.

The ascent proved to be much more rapid than he had expected, but the water was not deep. At least half of the way the foundation was a ledge worn smooth by the long contact with the stream. Miniature falls, too, from two to four feet high, had to be passed, but no great delay was caused thereby.

Next to Yank came Sam and Mollie; then Herkimer and Estella; then Doctor Fogg; and at the rear Trail-Lifter and Madame Granville. All the women needed help from their particular escorts, and no one was more attentive than the Modoc. If his duty pleased him he failed to express the fact, but his stoical manner expressed no reluctance to have such a companion.

Like Nevermiss, he had helped all kinds of women and men, and it was a matter-of-fact duty.

Each of the male members of the party carried a torch, and the light fell upon grim and frowning walls of rock. At times these dripped moisture, and the black recesses were by no means inviting, but even the doctor understood that idle fancies must not be considered in this matter of life and death.

Moses soon became the leading explorer. He was too dignified to exhibit undue levity, but with grim and impressive resolution he pushed to the front and marched on in the water, while Yank divided his running commentaries between his dog friend and his human followers.

Progress was slow and disagreeable, but it was gratifying to see that the passage did not contract as they advanced. Now and then they had to stoop as they passed under a point of rock, but a domed roof usually followed just beyond.

They struggled slowly and painfully ahead, wading in water, scaling rocks and getting an occasional bruise, until Nevermiss judged they had gone a hundred yards.

Then he paused and, holding his torch high above his head, looked back with a cheerful smile.

"Wal, neighbors, how be you all?" he asked.

"We are doing splendidly," Mollie bravely answered.

"I knewed you'd say so—I did, by burley! You don't ketch the little woman losin' courage, Sam'l!"

"You're right, general, by George!" heartily agreed the Pilot. "Heroism and Mollie are one and the same thing."

"It does surprise me," cried Mollie merrily, "to see how foolish you two men can be! You know just how weak-hearted we girls are, and

you take advantage of our vanity to flatter us."

"Flatter!" exclaimed Sam in his deepest base voice. "By George! if any man says you're less than what we say you are, that man shall answer to me, and I have an idea that I am a desperate person when aroused. General, how does this compare with Bunker Hill, eh?"

"Thar's a strong likeness, ef my gran'father didn't make no mistake in what he obsarved; but we ain't got no fife hyar, fur which I'm thankful. I'd ruther have the tick-tacks, jest now. Yes, or the atrocious newrolgy, either!"

"Mr. Yellowbird," put in a faint, quavering voice from the rear, "I have a bottle of the Royal Family Elixir in my pocket, and if you will at once take a dose of sixty drops—shaking the bottle well before taking—I am sure you will prevent the water from giving you new neuralgia pains. I am, indeed, sir!"

It was Doctor Fogg, and his pale face appeared at Herkimer's shoulder as he made his earnest plea.

"I thank ye hearty," dryly replied Nevermiss, "but the newrolgy seldom rages in my stummick. I'll put it off fur now, an' consider it when the pain lets up so I kin think clear, an' enj'y the medicine as sech a proper good article should be enj'ed. Neighbors, we'll go on. Moses, poke ahead!"

The dog condescended to vibrate his tail a trifle, and the journey was resumed.

They clambered over another ledge, and then Yank made a sudden discovery. The flame of his torch began to waver, and to point slightly toward him.

Nothing else at that time could have interested him so much. There was only one way to explain this wavering, and that gave rise to hope. The movement of the flame was caused by a circulation of air, and as there had been nothing of the kind before, it went to show that they were approaching the outer world.

Not a word said the mountaineer, for he would not arouse hopes which might not be realized, but looking back after a little while, he met a glance from Sam Perkins so significant that he knew the young guide had made the same discovery.

Forward they went, but the ascent was no longer rapid; it was only just perceptible. The hight of the passage had lessened until Yank had to stoop as he walked, but the flickering of the torch increased—then suddenly became marked.

Nevermiss ordered a halt again, and shielding the light as much as possible so that it would not be seen in advance, if any one chanced to be there, went on alone.

The journey was soon over.

At a distance of eighty feet he found an opening at one side—though the passage and the stream continued, to the right-hand side, as before—and he looked out and saw the starry dome of Heaven above.

The opening was so small that he had to drop on his hands and knees to pass out. This he did, and then stood erect. He drew in a deep breath, lifted his old fur cap and looked around with gratitude and admiration in his heart. For at least thirty seconds he stood thus, and then low spoken words passed his lips.

"It's a fine world; an' egregious fine world!" he murmured; "an' we never 'preciate it more than after bein' buried alive. Land o' Goshen! how mortal cheerful them stars look! Thar's a haze on the sky, an' the twinklers ain't out so bright as at times, but they make a sight good fur human eyes. It's a big, grand world, an' I thank the Master o' Life that He gives me bein' ter enjoy the wonders created by His hand!"

The speaker looked with rare appreciation, but Moses aroused him to a sense of sterner things by rubbing against his knee.

"To be sure!" Yank exclaimed, starting. "You're right, dog; we mustn't stan' hyar in idleness. We'll go on a bit o' scout, ter see whar there is a gap we kin slip through ter escape the inemy. Keep yer eyes open, Moses, an' ef you see an atrocious red insect, jest tell me so."

The mountaineer's odd conceits were again in full play, and he nodded to his faithful companion as though Moses, indeed, had power of speech.

Then he glided away among the rocks.

Over half an hour passed before he rejoined his friends in the passage. Some had grown alarmed, but Paradise Sam's confidence was unbounded.

"The red-skin ain't born—no; nor the white-skin, either—who caught the best of the general!" Sam had declared, heartily. "Why, by George! that man knows more than twenty other men combined. There never was another man like Yank Yellowbird, and never will be. He get into trouble? The idea is absurd! Bear in mind what becomes of doubters. The general will show up all right."

This assertion was verified when the tall form of the mountaineer reappeared, and his report put all in better spirits.

The danger of death by drowning was past, and they had what Sam aptly termed "a fighting chance for life." Yank reported that he had investigated all that was possible in the time he had taken, and though he found the Sioux thick upon the mountain, there was

hope that the white fugitives could steal through. This they must try to do, and practice no delay in the work.

Yank called Sam and Trail-Lifter to one side. "Neighbors, I have a few 'arnest words ter say ter you," he observed, gravely. "We hav some precious lives in this party, an' no atrocious inex must barm 'em. On t'other hand, we hav some off-color associates. That doctor is a weak sister, though he means wal; while Estella an' the Frencher woman are open ter spishion. Estella I b'lieve in, toler'bly myself; but the Frencher is a condemn'd snake, by hurley! Trail-Lifter, thar is no one wiser or shrewder than you, an' I perpose ter make you leader. You'll go at the head, an' I'll come next, with the Frencher in tow."

A transient gleam of humor appeared in Yank's gray eyes, and he pointed his index finger at Sam as he added:

"I hate like the mischief ter be seen in the Frencher's company, an' I hope you won't spread the news abroad. Ef any o' the other Yellowbirds should hear on't, they might not realize the desperateness o' the sarcumstances, an' they'd say 'twas a mortal bad blot on the fam'ly pedigree."

"It shall be kept dark, general."

"Jes' so—to be sure! Now, Sam'l, you'll still have charge o' Mollie. I want ter say ag'in, that this is because I hav a good 'eal o' confidence in you. Thar are qualities about you that please me amazin', an' I feel sure you're a mortal capable man. Some time, when we hav more time, I'd like ter hav you post me on the Perkins ancestry, fur I don't doubt but it's ekul ter most any pedigree. Now, we'll go ahead."

They rejoined their companions, and Yank led them out into the open air, after giving full and serious cautions to them. They were going where danger would encompass them on every hand, and prudence was vitally necessary.

All was quiet when they emerged from the tunnel, and the Modoc glided away with panther-like steps in the direction indicated by Nevermiss.

It was a time of keenest anxiety, for the Indians were thick about them, and a chance encounter would be liable to result in the death of every fugitive.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE OTHER MAN AT THE LOG.

It had been no idle praise when Yank declared that Trail-Lifter was fully capable of leading the way. The two men had been companions in many a long scout, and on many a dangerous trail, and, Indian though he was, the Modoc had received half his tuition in the ways of the war-path from the white mountaineer.

He speedily showed that none of his former skill had been lost.

He led the line, and his footfalls were as noiseless as a phantom's. This could not be said of those who followed, in some cases, but they did as well as could be expected. Yank kept by Madame Granville's side, but, suspicious as he was, he found no cause to reproach her.

She appeared to be terrified, but her wits were not all gone.

Several minutes passed in progress of this nature, and no foe appeared to bar their way. At last their course became along the line of a sloping cliff, and, looking down, they saw the camp-fire of one detachment of Sioux blazing a hundred yards away.

It was of sufficient size to illuminate the immediate vicinity of the camp, and the figures of the red-men were brought out with striking distinctness. It was a wild, grim, fierce-looking gang, and it needed no argument to convince the beholders that the Sioux's dearest ambition was to slay just such persons as those then regarding them.

Well aware that the sight was not one to encourage the weaker members of his party, Yank permitted only a brief halt. The journey was resumed and the camp-fire soon lost to sight behind the rocks.

It was in the fugitives' favor that the night was not light. In any case they could move but slowly, and as the moon had not risen, the light of the stars favored them by leaving the gulches in dark shadow, and concealing their movements from any one who might be on more elevated ground.

That they were not the only persons moving was soon shown most emphatically.

They were passing through a gulch when Trail-Lifter suddenly came to a halt. Of course the others followed his example, and there was a brief delay. The Modoc and Yank spoke in tones inaudible to the others, and then the former glided away. He quickly disappeared in the darkness, and his soft footfalls gave no clew to his movements.

Several minutes passed. The period of waiting grew painful. All felt sure that danger menaced them, but only Nevermiss knew what it was.

Paradise Sam was looking ahead as sharply as possible, and he saw a dark spot which seemed darker than the surrounding area, and had the shape of a human being.

There was life in the shadow, but it moved but slowly. It was advancing in a way barely per-

ceptible. The Pilot quiet'y drew his knife. He felt positive that the object was a skulking Sioux, and though he considered Trail-Lifter capable of caring for any one man, he did not know how many more might be at hand.

Herkinier had evidently made the same discovery, and he became uneasy. He whispered to Yank:

"Won't he see us?"

"Prob'ly he does, now."

The veteran's calm reply checked the questioner; he realized that the matter was in the hands of those who knew better than he what ought to be done.

Slowly the Sioux continued his advance. He reached a boulder and hesitated beside it for a moment. Then another shadow appeared by his side—he threw up one hand—both shadows sunk down, and only the boulder was to be seen.

A slight sound followed, as though some hard object had struck the rock: then all was still.

Brave as she was, Mollie shivered.

Again a shadow rose by the boulder, and then it advanced quickly toward them.

"'Tis the Modoc!" said Yank, calmly.

Trail-Lifter came up and spoke stoically.

"The way is clear," he announced.

No one answered; all knew how it had been made clear. There was a Sioux warrior by the boulder who would never again seek the blood of his fellow beings. The knowledge was enough, and once more they followed the Modoc.

Thus far no definite plan had been laid for the future, though, in a vague way, the leaders intended to secure horses and get away if possible; but it was considered enough for the time to think of getting through the Sioux lines.

No one was confident enough of their ability to do this to plan for anything ahead.

The rare skill of Nevermiss and his red ally was constantly shown as they advanced. At no time could they proceed rapidly, and now and then a halt had to be made while Trail-Lifter scouted ahead. Parties of Sioux were found here and there, and some were in motion, but by deviations from their course, and by biding for a time, the fugitives avoided them.

A discovery of a different kind was at hand.

They reached a gulch and heard men coming down, and once more they secreted themselves. As the strangers came nearer a discovery was made which changed the situation materially.

Voces were heard, and they were not those of Indians.

If appearances did not deceive, it was another lot of fugitives.

Yank suddenly became interested, and desirous of settling their identity, and chance favored him. The unknown leader paused opposite the mountaineer's party and spoke in a curt manner.

"See hyar!" he exclaimed; "I'm willin' ter work but I ain't a cart-horse. I want less talk—in fact, I won't have any talk. You're doin' pretty fair, all but your chinnin'. Now, you've got ter let up on that, or count Alf Blinker out of yer number. Ef you want ter lose your skulps you may, but I won't lose mine ter keep you comp'ny!"

"You are right, Blinker!" a second man promptly replied. "Your wisdom is not to be disputed, and I order all here to cease talking."

"All right, boss; then we'll go on in harmony. I ain't a kicker, but reds is thick as fleas, an' our only hope is ter avoid 'em. Blessed little we could do in a fight, though when we git ter the knoll, we'll be tolerable safe. Reds is bad critters!"

"I consait you're right, Alf Blinker."

It was Yank Yellowbird's voice that made the interruption, and Blinker made a great start and threw up the hammer of his rifle.

"Don't fire, Alfred!" added the mountaineer. "You ain't got a better frien' hyar than I be, by hurley!"

"I ought ter know that voice," muttered Blinker.

"So ye had, an' ye ought ter know its owner, too. Look at me!"

Nevermiss stepped from cover, and in a moment more he and Blinker were shaking hands.

"Yank Yellowbird, by thunder!" Alf exclaimed.

"Right, Alfred, right; but we can't stop ter make much talk. In one word, be you 'scortin' white fugitives away from Sioux?"

"I be."

"So am I."

"Bufflers an' bone-steaks! you don't say so! Say, Yank, can't we jine parties? I've got a hidin'-place all picked out on a hill-top."

"Why not pass the critters an' make a run until mornin', an' then bide?"

"It can't be did. I've b'en over the ground, an' the reds hev it roped in with their demons in great shape. Ef we try ter get through we'll be gobbed, sure."

Yank turned to his friends.

"Come out, neighbors! Hyar is Alf Blinker, a good scout an' honest man; I vouch for him. I obsarve he has sev'ral men along with him, not ter mention the women. Won't it be best fur us all ter unite?"

Every voice was raised in the affirmative, and conversation ceased right there. Blinker, an experienced borderer, declared that their lives

might depend upon getting to his refuge at once, and it needed only Yank's approval to make his will the law of all.

The journey was resumed.

Half a mile lay between them and the knoll, and they met fresh danger by the way, but they avoided discovery and met with success. The refuge was duly reached.

It proved to be a high peak, or cone, with precipitous sides, and space enough at the top for a camp. This top rose above all the immediate country, making it out of the range of bullets, and an assault would certainly be attended with great loss to the assailants.

Here the allies settled down, and the men went to work to strengthen their position by means of rude breastworks of logs and rocks. There was a general feeling of encouragement, for they possessed a week's supply of provisions, and enough ammunition to hold their own during a hard fight.

Nevermiss was as active as usual in the construction of the breastwork, and at one point he seized a log which required another pair of hands. He spoke to the man next to him.

"Lay hold, will ye, neighbor?"

Not a word of reply was made, but the request was complied with promptly. The log was placed in position, and then the two turned so as to face each other. Hardly had this been done before Yank came to a full stop. He had seen his assistant distinctly, and a familiar face was revealed.

The man was Ames Rochester!

"Land o' Goshen! you hyar!" demanded the mountaineer, in surprise.

"As you see, sir," was the pacific reply.

"But I thought you was a pris'ner."

"So I was, but I escaped. The red-skins had me tied up, but I chafed my bonds asunder, got away and happened upon Blinker's party. I hope, sir, I am not unwelcome here."

"No honest man who kin fight Injuns is ter be barred out now," the veteran returned, but his tone was not cordial, and he improved a chance which then offered to resume work, and to end the conversation.

He was not pleased to have Rochester for a companion.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

A DARK NIGHT AND A RED FIELD.

IT was morning again.

An Indian was gliding through a ravine, his body bent, his gaze first resting on the ground and then flasing sharp glances toward all points in advance. He passed the ravine; he went through a sparse wood; he clambered up a ridge; and then before him rose a high, cone-like hill with precipitous sides.

He flashed another glance up to the top of the cone; then his eyes blazed fiercer than ever, and he sunk down among the bushes.

Yank Yellowbird and Paradise Sam stood at the top of the cone, watching the red prowler from cover.

"He knows we're hyar," remarked the former. "It is egregious hard ter fool a red-skin, an' that one has seen some sign that tells him we're hyar. He foller'd the trail like a bloodhound, an' he has his reward."

"And will go to the other red fiends with his story—if we let him."

"To be sure."

"It would be easy to drop him, general."

"Mortal easy."

"Then he would not tell his story."

"The rifle-shot would speak for him, Sam'l."

"Sure enough."

"Ef Trail-Lifter was down thar, Mister Sioux would soon get a lesson, but he ain't thar, an' it's too late now. Arter he's once got the clew, only a streak o' lightnin' could run him down."

"The fun will soon begin."

"It will, by hurley! an' thar will be lots on't. I expeck we will have an egregious time. Wish I had my gran'father's fife hyar, an' I'd set Doctor Frog ter blowin' it when the fight begins: it's the only kind o' tick-tacks the doctor's good for, anyhow, an' this hill is summut like Bunker Hill, I take it. Wish my cousin, the poetry-writer, was hyar now. She was a master-hand at what she called heroic poems. She writ one on how Samson Yellowbird pulled down the pillars o' some temple, in old times, an' crushed his enemies, an' it was a right good tbing ter read, ef ye didn't take too much on't at once. My two brothers, Malachi an' Shadrach, used ter read it at temp'rance meetin's in consort, an' it saved a good many men from the evils o' sour cider an' root beer."

"Two very dangerous things."

"To be sure, an' their affeks is impnicious an' deadly. Thar ain't but one wu'ss thing than drunkardness, an' that's measles. Measles is condemn'd bad. My brother, Phineas, bad 'em seven times, an' each time was harder than t'others. 'Twas chronical with him, an' I s'pect he's still havin' 'em. 'Twas hereditary, though; he takin' 'em down by descent from Uriel, the first son of Adam Yellowbird an' Eve Smith, o' the Garden o' Eden. In Adam's days measles wa'n't wal understood, an' Eve was egregiously flustered when Uriel was taken with 'em."

"No doubt."

"She couldn't consult her marm, Eve couldn't; fur Mrs. Smith was away visitin', so they called in a French doctor who had jest settled in them parts. The doctor proscribed frogs' legs, fu'st off; but they didn't have no effect, and afore they mastered the complaint they had in all the doctors 'round them parts. Adam's father said the distemper was more voy' lent than any complaint epidemical when he was a boy. This ain't ter the p'int though. I've observed, Sam'l, that Rochester an' the Frenchwoman has b'en talkin' private."

"Yes."

"I mistrust 'em."

"New mischief afoot?"

"Can't say thar is, but they don't look at us lovin'. Rochester pretends ter be perlite, but he hates us."

"I observe that Estella shuns them."

"Tbar's a heap o' trouble on her mind."

"I believe you."

"Land o' Goshen! yes—I consait she's in their power, somehow. One thing is sartain, though, Pilot, an' that is, ef Estella calls on me fur help, them two snakes will let her alone or git thrashed like hurley!"

The mountaineer struck his hand upon his rifle forcibly, but the approach of Alf Blinker stopped the conversation.

The Sioux had disappeared, but Blinker agreed with them that an attack was soon to be apprehended. They had made full preparations for it. The breastwork was done, and was a good protection. The cone would be a hard place to take by assault. On three sides it was extremely steep, and on the fourth a sheer precipice made ascent impossible. For some distance from the top no living tree stood. Once it had been wooded to the top, but every tree had been prostrated long before except two trunks which now stood like ragged signal-posts.

The defenders consisted of fourteen men, all told, and fifteen women, and the Indians would find it warm work to face all the hostile rifles they could command.

An hour passed from the time the skulking Sioux was seen, and then the result became visible.

Keen-eyed Yank Yellowbird detected the red-men gathering, and they were soon near the cone. The defenders did not intend to open the fight without provocation, but the enemy took considerable pains to protect themselves. No useless exposure was made, but they crawled, twisted and writhed through the bushes, and from rock to rock, like veritable snakes.

Their number could not be estimated, but to the novices they seemed about as numerous as the bushes which concealed them.

Such of the defenders as were experienced Indian-fighters wondered what course they would take, but it was a long while before the point was settled. When the cone was well surrounded there was a lull, and no sign was given. At times not a Sioux was to be seen; anon a swarthy face would be lifted as its owner made a survey.

It was impossible to say where many of them were, and as it seemed an odd course for so many to pass the day lying idly in cover, there was some ground to believe that, after making a formidable showing, nearly all had temporarily withdrawn to work against white fugitives not brought to bay.

Hours passed.

The defenders kept their position, but there was no one to fight. At times, the sound of firing was heard in the distance; and Indians were seen there, but everything about the cone was peaceful.

Noon came and passed; the sun sunk in the western sky; night again fell upon the scene.

It was generally understood that some decisive move would be made before morning. With their coveted victims surrounded, the Sioux could afford to wait for their favorite hour of attack, but they would not leave the cone unnoticed until morning.

The men of the besieged free had taken the precaution of sleeping during the day, and were in good condition for the night-watch.

When all preparations had been completed they sat down to await the attack. It was a long wait, though not more so than the experienced borderers expected. No attack was expected until past midnight.

The critical period approached. The camp on the cone was quiet. The women seemed to sleep; the men crouched behind the breastworks, rifle in hand, and awaited the coming of the foe. The night was dark, but not radically so. If the pale, emaciated, frightened-looking moon which had of late been seen skulking through the sky was on this occasion out on any errand, it was concealed by light clouds; but the chances were that the moon had business somewhere.

The first note of alarm came.

It was a low word from Trail-Lifter, who was looking down the slope with unwavering attention.

The warning passed along the line; then even the most inexperienced could see the enemy coming.

Like panthers they ascended the slope. Light

of foot as the animals named, they came over rock and log, rapidly, agilely, silently.

Alf Blinker shouted a hoarse challenge.

It was answered with a chorus of discordant yell.

Then the Sioux came on openly, leaping up the sharp rise with ease. Blinker gave the word and every rifle at the breastwork flashed. The men had orders to select their particular targets carefully, and more than one screeching warrior was stopped forever. The others remained undaunted, and the cone was almost black with them.

They came to meet a warm reception.

Eight of the defenders had repeating rifles, and some of them were cool enough to take careful aim each time. It was a deadly fire which swept down to meet the assailants.

Babel seemed to have come again. The screeches of the Sioux mingled with the sturdy shouts of the white men, and the reports of the rifles gave sharp accompaniment to the discordant music.

Even bullets did not check the assailants, however. They came on until so close that revolvers were brought into use, and as there were men behind the breastwork who could make almost every shot tell, the Sioux fell fast and thick. Thus far the loss was all on one side, but enough remained to take the place of those who fell, and a more desperate crisis was at hand.

The deadly enemies met at the barricade.

The struggle became hand-to-hand.

If any one of the defenders wavered it did not show, and they met the red-men with clubbed rifles, with revolvers, knives and stones. Stoutly they stood to their post, and blow was given for blow. Even the women were busy; they reloading the empty revolvers, and the advantage was kept on their side.

The desperate savages hurled themselves against the coveted prey, but the breastwork bothered them, and the few who passed it fell immediately after. Their number had decreased perceptibly, and nothing but dogged resolution held them to work.

If the fort could be defended a little longer it was clear that the first attack must fail, but the issue depended on the resources of the Sioux.

CHAPTER XXXV.

YANK TAKES THE TRAIL.

A TRUE American cheer arose from behind the breastwork. The defenders stood there resolutely, but there was no one to fight; the Sioux were fleeing down the cone as willingly as they had come up. Met by an iron barrier and terribly decimated in number, they could no longer face the wave of destruction. They fled, and the battle was lost and won.

"Hurrah!" shouted Alf Blinker, loudly; "I reckon the white blood is good for any use. Down with the reds. Three cheers, lads!"

The cheers were given with a will.

"It was a mortal pretty fight, by hurley!" Yank Yellowbird agreed. "It kep' me right busy, though, an' I'mafeerd Moses overtaxed his strength pullin' down the atrocious insex."

He looked solicitously at the dog, but Moses, grim and calm as ever, looked as if he had strength enough to fight a bear.

"It has been lively, by George!" Paradise Sam agreed, "but there's lots of fun in such work; it stirs up all one's sluggish blood. Great thing for a change, is fighting. All we needed was to hear your grandfather's fife!"

"Land o' Goshen! wouldn't the old gentleman enjoyed it, though! It ree'lly must 'a' ekn'ld Bunker Hill, an' the tick-tacks was fine. When I see my cousin, the poetess, I'll have a string o' verses th'ree yards long writ on the subjick. She'll write one fit ter stir up the blood amazin'!"

Paradise Sam sung his old song heartily:

"The West, the West, the boundless West!

It is the land for men of sand!

Here Nature greets each happy guest,

And grants the object of his quest;

Here he may seek with eager ze-t,

The daring sports that he loves best,

While pleasures grand on every hand

Adorn the Paradise out West!

It is the land for men of sand—

The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

The singer was greeted with another round of cheers, and then, as it was certain that the attack was abandoned for the time, attention was given to the wounded. None of the defenders had fallen, and though several had painful injuries, not one was dangerous.

They were thus engaged, and Yank had just finished applying a bandage with great care and skill, when Sam approached hastily.

"General, have you seen Mollie?" he demanded.

Nevermiss sprung to his feet.

"What's that?" he asked, in a startled way.

"I can find Mollie nowhere on the hill-top!"

Yank's bronzed face lost color, but he swept a quick glance around.

"Whar's Ames Rochester?" he demanded.

"I hadn't thought of that—"

"We'll think on't right away!"

The mountaineer turned, and with long steps he made the circuit of the camp, Sam following close after him.

"Rochester is gone!" the Pilot then announced, excitedly.

"That ain't all—the French woman an' Estella are gone, too! Sam'l, be you at a loss ter understand this?"

"Unfortunately, I am not. While we fought the Indians Rochester and the female fiend were busy. In some way, they got Mollie and Estella away."

"Yas, an' they're prisoners now. May the good Lord watch over the poor little woman."

The mountaineer's voice shook with emotion, and the hand which held his rifle trembled as though with palsy. His tall form, always so erect for one of his years, had suddenly grown bent, and he seemed on the point of collapse.

Paradise Sam laid his broad hand firmly upon the veteran's shoulder.

"Cheer up, general! You and I still live, and we'll rescue Mollie or die in the attempt!"

Yank grasped the friendly hand warmly.

"Sam'l, you've got a heart of oak, an' ef thar is a man who walks on two feet who has my good will, respect an' confidence, it's you. You please me egregiously, an' I'm proud o' your friendship!"

"General, such praise does me proud when it comes from the king of bordermen and the honestest of men!" Sam declared. "I'm yours to death, in rain and shine, and I'll swear you head the line of A 1 men. Count me in with you as long as we tramp the West together. And now, what about Mollie?"

Yank pressed his young friend's hand once more, and then all his emotion vanished. He drew up his tall figure; his face grew composed, albeit a trifle hard; and he was again the keen, alert, cool-headed mountaineer.

"Foller me, Sam'l!" he directed. "I hev an idee we may diskiver somethin'."

They did make discoveries. A line of knotted lassoes was found hanging down the cliff, and as it touched the ground it was easy to see how the missing persons had gone.

Some light was thrown upon the matter when it was found that another man was missing, for it was inferred that Rochester had won him over as an ally.

A conference followed. Yank and Sam announced that they were going to Mollie's rescue at once, and the rescue-party was strengthened at Alf Blinker's own suggestion. The latter was so confident of their ability to hold the cone that he said they could do without Trail-Lifter, and when Gilbert Herkimer, who seemed considerably agitated, asked leave to make one of the rescuers, he was not refused.

As a result, Yank, Sam, Trail-Lifter and Gilbert prepared for the trail, and when all was ready they began the attempt to leave the cone secretly. Even Yank doubted their ability to do this, for he expected to find a line of Sioux stretched around, but their movement was a success, and the fact was soon explained.

Once at a point of safety, they paused while the Modoc made a scout to learn whether Mollie was in the hands of the Indians. He reported, on his return, that there was nothing to show that she was their prisoner, and that they were in council.

The latter fact showed why no encircling line of warriors had been found. The Sioux had not expected any one to try to leave the cone, though, half an hour later, they were so arranged that departure would have been out of the question.

The rescuers had moved just in time.

It was agreed that the chances of finding Mollie and her captors before day revealed their trail was not favorable, but as inactivity would have been a positive source of mental agony, they made the attempt. Deciding that Rochester would be likely to go to the east, if he wished to avoid the Indians, they started rapidly in that direction.

The next hour was passed in a search which, being without other method, aimed only to cover as much ground as possible, the men hoping they could by chance run upon those they sought.

In this they were not successful.

At last they paused in a gulch and seated themselves on a boulder at one side. They proceeded to discuss the case fully. While they were thus engaged Moses was moving around, his nose held close to the ground and his manner uneasy.

"The dog hates to give up," Sam Perkins remarked.

"He's brimful o' grit, Moses is; an' we'd soon ketch the atrocious insex ef once we could strike the trail. I consait I've said that a dozen times sence we left the fort, but it ain't less true than it was afore."

"What does the dog scent?" asked the Modoc, abruptly.

"He seems to be experimenting," suggested Gilbert.

There was a momentary silence, during which Yank and Trail-Lifter both regarded Moses critically.

"He does act mortal funny, Modoc." Nevermiss then said. "Who's got a match?"

Paradise Sam quickly produced the article named.

"I'll take a look," added the mountaineer, rising.

He found a pine splinter near at hand and soon had it ignited, and when it was burning sufficiently, he held it close to the ground and began his investigation. Moses signified his approval of this move by indulging a degree of friskiness very unlike himself, and then he held his nose near the ground more persistently than ever.

"Land o' Goshen!" Yank exclaimed, "hyar's tracks that ain't ounr, an' some on 'em are females' tracks, too. See the rainrod-heels, Modoc? One, two—three women, by hurley! An'—Look thar, Sam'l!—will ye look? Ef that ain't Mollie's track, I'm losin' my wits as a trailer!"

"By George! I believe you're right, general!" agreed Sam, in his deepest base voice.

"Right? Sartain I'm right; I couldn't be mistook as ter her track. It's the pootiest, trimmest, neatest, perfectest foot you ever seen. Sam'l, it's her track!"

Nevermiss was excited, but the Modoc remained as stoical as ever.

"Two men and three women," he announced, coolly. "We have the trail, and it needs only your word, Nevermiss, to make the dog follow it true as an arrow."

"He shall have it! Moses, old frien', take it up! Foller on. Go on, good Moses; you've serv'd me wal many a year, but you never had a case as valler'ble as this. Foller fur your life, Moses!"

The dog indulged in a low, quick bark; then his nose went down and he started on the trail. The men followed eagerly.

"The mountaineer is not himself," observed Trail-Lifter, addressing Sam in an undertone. "Many a day have I scouted with him, and nothing could shake his steady nerves. Neither danger nor distress could make him less than the warrior, though his big heart was full of good will to all, and he was a hero whenever the good and unfortunate needed his aid. He has lost no part of his old strength of body or mind, and is still like a young man; but the fair white girl has won his heart. He cares more for her than all the world besides, and it would grieve him sorely if harm come to her. She is fair and good, and he loves her well."

"I feel that way, myself!" Sam confessed, tersely.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MOSES WINS GLORY.

EVERY ONE was eager in the pursuit, and the men were given a chance to use all the speed they wished. The dog guide was not for a moment at loss, and his speed was gauged by the rapidity with which his human followers could go. Moses was in his element, and was coming out in his strength. His record in the past was remarkable, but, of late, he had had no chance to show his ability.

Now the chance was given him, and he was improving it fully.

The trail was so fresh that, to one of his acuteness, it was very easy to pursue it, and he led the men at a rate which at once aroused their hopes and put them considerably out of breath.

"Moses is a wonder!" commented Paradise Sam.

"It'd take ye a year ter find out half that dog's good p'ints," answered the mountaineer, who had recovered all his resolution. "Seems ter me a good many men must feel egregious mean an' small when they see a good dog or boss; it may not be the fault o' the humans, but they compare poor with dogs an' horses. I consait thar never was another dog ekal ter Moses, an' never will be. He's got an amazin' good mind, an' is wal posted in Greek, Latin an' Hottentot, an' other dead languages; an' I ain't sure but he could speak ef he would, but he's an artom reserved, is Moses."

The object of this high praise still pursued his way, and his course was so direct that no one ever doubted that he was on the right track.

Yank and the Modoc frequently glanced toward the east. Day was not far away, and when it became light, their experienced eyes would be able to corroborate the evidence of the dog's nostrils. Already the darkness was growing less noticeable, and objects which had before been dim became distinct in a dark way.

Little conversation was indulged in, but Moses still kept up his speed, and it became certain that the other party must soon be overtaken. No woman unaccustomed to the mountains could long continue rapidly over such rough territory.

Still increased the light, until the gray, dismal dawn was upon the mountain, and the men began to look about eagerly. Another change was at hand, however. They reached the top of a ridge, and there Moses paused, one foot held aloft in air where it had been checked in a forward step, his manner alert and hostile.

They followed the course of his gaze.

The fugitives were visible at last!

At the foot of the ridge were five persons—Mollie, Estella, Madame Granville, Ames Rochester and the latter's ally. All were seated, and it appeared that they had halted to

rest; the women looked weary and discouraged. Yank's eyes lighted up.

"We have 'em, neighbors; we have 'em!" he exclaimed. "The atrocious insex have been run down, an' we only need ter gobble 'em. We'll do it at once, by hurley!"

He took a step forward, but as he did so, a rifle-shot sounded only a few yards away, and Rochester's aid clapped both hands to his breast and fell dead on the ground. The fugitives sprung to their feet. From the rocks close at hand a dozen Sioux warriors were rushing toward them.

"Fire!" cried Nevermiss. "Secrecy won't work hyar. Drop the red insex!"

Two more shots sounded in the ravine and Ames Rochester fell.

Almost like an echo came a volley from the ridge—the rescuers had taken their turn, and four of their Indians dropped never to rise.

Another moment and Yank and his friends were bounding down the descent.

There was a scream from the women. The Sioux were already beside them, and each warrior essayed to secure a captive. He was playing with worse than fire; he was trifling with death.

A whirlwind seemed to burst upon the party.

Yank, Sam, Trail-Lifter and Herkimer dashed at them, and at least three of the four were skillful fighters. Their rush at first seemed irresistible, and the Sioux were swept back, but the superiority of numbers was still with the latter, and they rallied and gave stroke for stroke. The fight waxed warm, and the report of revolvers was mingled with the clash of knives, while the shouts of the contestants, added to the rest, made a wild uproar. The Sioux screeched; Trail-Lifter sounded a war-whoop peculiarly clear and thrilling; Sam Perkins roared defiance in the most musical baritone; while Yank had a running fire of his characteristic remarks to pour upon the men he was systematically clubbing with his long rifle.

Against such fighters the red-men could not stand; the remnant that remained turned and fled.

They left a red field behind them.

Not one person except the victors remained standing. Half the Sioux had fallen; Rochester and his aid were prostrate; Madame Granville lay half-concealed in the underbrush; while Estella crouched down with her face covered with her hands.

Nevermiss looked anxiously around for Mollie. She was not to be seen. The ravine was almost wholly free from bushes, and it was the work of but a few moments to learn that she was nowhere about. The mountaineer questioned his friends; no one had seen Mollie since the charge was made; no one could say what had become of her.

Let the thread of the story be turned for a time from Yank and his anxiety, to show what had really occurred to his mountain ward.

It has already been stated that when the Sioux made their charge, each one essayed to seize a victim. Brave as Mollie was she could not remain calm when savages were screeching and rifles echoing around her, and as she had not seen the white men, or received any intimation of their proximity, she only obeyed a natural impulse when, seeing a glittering-eyed warrior leaping toward her, she turned and fled from the camp.

Not for a moment did she suspect that friends were at hand, and with the idea strong in her mind that everything depended upon her own efforts, she started with the hope of getting clear of both her late captors and the Sioux. Terror, too, urged her to the step.

She fled through the ravine at full speed, and, when it ended, ascended an acclivity. She had satisfied herself that she was not closely pursued, but when she reached the top of the slope she looked back and saw an Indian running after her.

It was a sight which terrified her. She believed she could see the glitter of his eyes, and, certainly, she could see the knife he held in his muscular hand.

A comparatively level gulch stretched away before her, and she turned once more and fled at full speed. She had a desperate race to run, and the fact soon dawned upon her. When the Sioux reached the gulch he covered ground at a rate of speed most alarming to her, and she saw him cut down the intervening distance foot by foot.

Already she breathed with painful effort, but she struggled on as only those struggle who see life at stake. Her footing grew insecure, and, at times, she stumbled and nearly fell, but her natural courage sustained her when hope seemed utterly gone.

Nearer came the Indian. Not a word passed his lips, but he had almost closed the gap. Mollie no longer dared to look around, but every moment she expected to feel the grasp of his hands.

The crisis was at hand.

She stumbled—she fell to her knees—the savage reached her side.

She covered her face with her hands and awaited the fatal stroke. An instant more and the red-man's fingers were twined in her hair. A shiver of awful dread ran over her—but the blow

did not come. Instead, the hostile grasp was relaxed; there was a fierce growl like a grizzly bear's utterance; a fall followed and she heard the sound of a struggle.

Terror had dazed her, and she was slow in looking around. When she did a strange scene met her gaze.

The Indian lay dead upon the ground, and over him stood Yank's faithful dog, Moses!

The revulsion of feeling overcame her, and once more she covered her face and burst into tears. All her strength was temporarily gone, and she failed to think clearly until a long, warm tongue was drawn across her hand. She looked, then, and met the gaze of Moses's big, honest eyes, and if ever eyes expressed devotion, his did at that moment.

She clasped her arms around his neck.

"Moses, oh! Moses!" she exclaimed, almost hysterically. "Good, honest Moses! Noble Moses!"

The dog vibrated his tail and thrust his nose against her neck with great vigor, evidently seeking to convey assurances of his devotion and sympathy. He had already given better proof than could be conveyed by mere sign of dog or word of man. Only for him Mollie would have lost her life before then; as it was, the Sioux lay dead on the ground, slain by the noble brute.

Several minutes passed before she released her hold, and all the while Moses was telling her in dog language that though, as a rule, he made it a point not to be on familiar terms with any one but his master, he had the warmest kind of feeling for her.

At last she remembered that other Indians might come, and she suddenly arose. In her opinion her one hope was to get further away.

"Come, noble Moses!" she directed, with a grateful glance toward her dumb friend.

Moses hesitated. He looked his disapproval. He glanced uneasily back, and told her in his way very plainly that he did not approve of her course, but he could give no reasons.

He did the next best thing—he obeyed.

With the dog close beside her Mollie hurried on. She knew not where her steps would take her; she had no thought except to widen the distance between her and her foes. On she went—on over rocks and through bushes—and with haste which covered a good deal of ground; and the presence of the dog gave her courage she could not otherwise have felt; but a new turn in the tide of affairs was at hand.

She was rapidly traversing a winding gulch when Moses suddenly gave utterance to a short, sharp bark. She looked up and saw a man not fifty feet distant.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE EVIDENCE OF THE LEAF.

THERE was no alarm in the now discovery, for the man was one the sight of whom gave promise of safety. It was Paradise Sam. Mollie's face brightened with joy, and Sam threw up one hand and looked backward.

"This way, general!" he shouted, cheerfully. "This way; the little woman is found!"

Then he hastened toward the girl and clasped her hand.

"Oh! Sam, Sam!" she cried, her eyes moist with tears, "I am so glad to see you!"

"By George! I'm in rapture, myself!" the Pilot asserted, his hearty voice growing suddenly husky. "We were terribly afraid harm had come to you, and this is a sight fit to cheer the most downcast heart. We have found you again, and we don't part again if an array of reds get after us. But here's the general!"

Yank Yellowbird came burrying up. His plain, honest face was all aglow with delight, but when he had taken Mollie's hand he was totally unable to speak. His lips trembled, and his emotion was so perceptible that Mollie broke the silence.

"I can see you are glad to meet me again, Nevermiss," she said, softly.

"Glad, little woman!" the mountaineer replied, in a shaking voice; "why, that don't anywhar nigh express it! It's the happiest minute I've seen in years. I feared the atrocious insex had got ye, but it's all right now. Mollie, I've always told ye the Master of Life watched wal over His creatures, an' you kin see it now. I wish I could say more, but I can't; my heart is full. But I thank Providence that I see ye safe back with us!"

"You would not have seen me had it not been for one thing."

"What's that?"

"Moses!"

Then in a few words she told the story of her adventures. Both men were deeply moved when they heard about the hostile Sioux, but the account of the dog's noble work restored all of Yank's cheerfulness. His face beamed with pleasure.

"Land o' Goshen! I'm proud on ye, Moses!" he exclaimed. "It's jest like ye, but you never did sech good work afore. You never saved another life so precious, for thar never wa' another so precious ter be saved. Not much, thar never was! Sam'l, I'll trouble ye ter look close at that animal. He's a bit grim o' visage, but I skeercely never seen a more intelligent head. He's got a mortal good brain, and his faithful-

ness is amazin'. Moses,"—here Yank pointed his forefinger at the dog—"you've done wal; you've done *very* wal; you've done most mighty wal, dog!"

Moses was not proof against such high praise, and he gave utterance to a short bark and half-reared upon his hind feet, as though to intimate that if his convictions were not so strong that a dog ought to be dignified, he would indulge in some most undignified gambols.

"Now ter go back," added the mountaineer. "I'll say, Mollie, that our danger is all over. An army or two o' soldiers has appeared, an' all the Injuns are runnin' away like scared wolves. It may shock ye ter hear it, but Ames Rochester an' Madame Granville are dead, shot by the Sioux. Rochester lived long enough ter make a confession, which shows an arton o' light on Zoe's case."

"Then Estella really is Zoe?"

"Yes, but he wanted ter change her into Estella Vance fur some reason I don't clearly see. He took her ter Starvation City fur that purpose, an' give her some egregious drug that put her in a trance. The burial arterwards was a sham, fur nobody was buried. Zoe became Estella, though why I don't know. She an' Gilbert are havin' a long talk, an' I consait they're goin' ter 'rive at some understandin'."

While talking the trio had been walking toward the west, and they suddenly came upon the Indian slain by Moses. Yank hurried Mollie past, but he had had time to make a discovery; the dead warrior was Heavy Knife, the vindictive young brave, and the old foe of Trail-Lifter.

His desire for scalps had been suddenly terminated.

Continuing their journey, they soon reached the place where Zoe, Herkimer and Trail-Lifter were waiting for them. One glance was enough to satisfy Mollie that the young couple had finished their conversation and arrived at an understanding, as Yank had predicted. Zoe came forward quickly and greeted Mollie with real affection. Her manner indicated that an incubus had been lifted from her life.

They were soon talking rapidly, and exchanging accounts of their experience, while the men looked on in smiling approval. When all was told, however, Zoe's quick gaze noticed something more.

"Are you wounded?" she cried.

"Wounded? No; why do you ask?"

"There is a long cut in your dress upon this shoulder, as though made with a knife."

Mollie shivered.

"It must have been done by the Sioux, for he was about to strike when the dog pulled him down. Or—remember that it is the same shoulder where the bullet hit me in the cave. Are you not looking at the mark then made?"

"Indeed, I am not," Zoe replied. "This is a new, narrow cut."

Her nimble fingers were busy as she spoke, and then she added:

"I am quite right, but you are not injured. Like the bullet, the knife barely drew blood; there is the smallest possible mark on the flesh, and, curiously enough, it is exactly in the center of that queer India-ink figure of the tropical leaf."

Yank Yellowbird made a sudden start.

"What's that?" he demanded, in a peculiar voice.

"Mollie has the figure of a queerly-shaped leaf marked on her shoulder in blue ink. I saw it when I looked to the scratch of the bullet in the cave."

Yank took two steps forward, and the attention of every one was drawn to him when his rifle fell heavily to the ground. His appearance almost startled those who surrounded him, for his bronzed face had grown pale, his eyes had a strange light, and the hand which he held out toward Mollie shook like a leaf in the wind.

The girl sprang to his side.

"You are ill!" she exclaimed, anxiously.

"No, no, little woman!" was the husky reply. "I ain't ill, but—what did the gal say?"

With a quick movement Zoe parted the shoulder of the dress where the mark of the knife, combined with that of the bullet, had made havoc.

"Look!"

Nevermiss obeyed. On the back of Mollie's white, plump shoulder appeared a mark in blue, and it was what Zoe had aptly termed "a queerly-shaped leaf."

The mountaineer saw, and then he grasped the girl's wrist.

"Child!" he cried, "is your real name Mollie Dixon?"

His voice shook more than ever, and his excitement had become almost uncontrollable, and what was more, it seemed to have been communicated to Mollie. She had grown pale, and she faced him in deep agitation.

"I don't know!" she replied, tremulously. "My name and my parents are alike a mystery to me, for I was a waif cast up by the river at the door of the kind couple who gave me their names."

"What was the river named?" asked Nevermiss, in a whisper, while his gaze devoured her face.

"It was the Kansas River."

"May the Master o' Life save my senses!" uttered the mountaineer. "What did ye wear, then, gal?"

"I had on a blue dress, with white spots in the shape of an irregular cross."

"When was it!—when was it, little woman?"

"Twenty years ago the 18th of this month, and I was then thought to be about two years old. I had come down on a platform of boards, and was lying asleep when the river brought me to land. The Dixons took me in, and as they failed to find any clew to who I was, adopted me as their child. They died years ago, and then I went out into the world to fight my own battles, and have lived in California and other places. I do not know who my parents were, nor what my real name is, but—"

She paused and looked even more earnestly at Nevermiss, but he sat down on a rock and brushed his hands across his eyes, as though to clear his vision.

"Give me time!" he said, huskily. "Give me time ter clear my mind. I can't realize what the signs p'intter, for it is amazin' strange. The figger on your shoulder, the dress, the Kansas River, the time—it dumfounds me, little woman. It looks like a great diskivery."

"The garments I wore were marked with a black-lined letter 'M,'" the girl added.

The mountaineer looked up with a gleam of recognition in his eyes.

"I remember it; I remember it!" he exclaimed. "It seems clear as the sun, but I can't realize it, even now. Listen, little woman, an' you shall hear the story in few words. I'll tell it fuller, bimeby, but not now."

"Mollie, I wa'n't always a lonely old trumper o' prairie an' mountain. At the age o' thirty, when I's a young hunter an' trapper, I met a young woman who seemed ter me the fairest an' best of all gals. Plain an' homely as I was she took a likin' ter me, too, an' we was married. I give up trampin', an' settled down fur life, as I thought, an' when we had a girl-baby, I was the happiest man alive."

The speaker paused and drew a deep sigh. Then he added:

"A great change come two years later. When I's away from home thar was a cyclone which tore the village all ter pieces. I come home an' found my wife's lifeless body, an' beside her was a baby they said was mine. My wife had skeercely a mark, but no one could recognize the baby fur sartain, the poor thing was so bruised. Either its clothes was off when the cyclone struck, or they was tore off, fur no clothes was on the little thing when found. Many babies, as wal as growed folks, was missin', buried in ruined houses, but that one dead child was found nigh my wife. When the neighbors told me 'twas my little Mary, I never doubted it. She was buried, an' I went out ag'in ter rove over the Nor'west, a lonely an' heartbroken man."

Utter, almost painful silence and suspense followed the last words, but Yank, controlling his emotions by a great effort, went on:

"In course o' time the wound grew less painful in my broken heart, an' though I never forgot the dead, the cheerful nature which it pleased the Master o' Life ter give me, come ter the surface ag'in; but never until to-day did I suspect any one o' my blood had escaped the cyclone."

"When I met you at Starvation City, little woman, I seen your likeness ter my dead wife right away, though it was mostly in your expression an' ways. Her eyes an' hair was darker nor yours, an' she was taller. But I seen the likeness, an' though the truth didn't dawn upon me—how could it?—my whole love went out ter you. I've tol' ye that afore now."

"Little woman, I'm mortally upset now, but I ask, how could you 'a' had ou the clothes I rec'leck so wal, marked with 'M' for 'Mary,' as I seen my wife mark 'em; an' how could that leaf have b'en marked in blue ink on your shoulder as I seen my wife's sailor brother mark it, unless you are my own darter?"

His voice sunk almost to a whisper, and he arose, his face full of eagerness, and held out his shaking hands.

Those who were standing by felt that it was a moment too sacred for outsiders to be present. They turned and went aside, but as they did so, they saw Mollie start forward and heard her exclaim:

"Father, my heart tells me you have judged aright!"

Anc' there they were left in a radiance of happiness which, for Yank, at least, was deeper than words could express.

The triumph of the soldiers who had arrived on the scene was complete; the Sioux had been put to flight and their prisoners rescued. Harmer Drake, sore of body, but not dangerously hurt, was among those saved, and he was a very meek man after his experience. It had been learned that Madame Granville went to the cave as a spy and decoy for the Sioux, but when they discovered the cave-stream they adopted a new plan. The horses left there were saved from drowning. The bodies of Ames

Rochester and the Frenchwoman were buried where they fell.

Herkimer and Zoe came to where Yank Yellowbird stood, proud and happy, beside his daughter, with Paradise Sam and Trail-Lifter near them.

"Friends," said Gilbert, "Miss Zoe and I are going away together to the East. Our object is to investigate a certain affair. At present we cannot explain more to you, but we shall meet again in the future."

"All right, friends," Yank answered, cheerfully. "You will go with our good will, you an' Zoe. The Modoc is goin' back ter his wife, too, pooty soon. The best o' friends must part. As fur me, I consait my Wild West days are over. Thar is a plan afoot which will give me a chance ter settle down, an' I tell ye it suits me egregious wal, arter my great diskivery. I kin then take keer o' my newrolgy as it should be, though Doctor Fogg says his Elixir would cure it. I sha'n't try the solution, though. All Yank Yellowbird needs is pure air an' good frien's, an' I consait I've got 'em—I have, by burley!"

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

"THE HAPPIEST HOME IN THE WORLD."

FIVE years after the scenes last recorded a horseman was riding across a prairie of southern Dakota. It was a ranch of unusual fertility; it gave evidence of careful attention, and the crops visible upon it were promising in the extreme.

The horseman was Gilbert Herkimer.

Along one side of the ranch stretched a timber-belt, and it was through this he was riding. The barking of a dog suddenly attracted his attention, and at the same moment he checked his horse as he came in sight of two living figures. One was the dog; the other was a man who sat at the foot of a tree with a rifle leaning against his shoulder.

It was Yank Yellowbird.

Five years had passed since Herkimer had seen him, but if it had been only one day, the change in the veteran would not have been less. He was the same Nevermiss of the ooden days. He wore a fur cap, which certainly looked like the original; his clothes still fitted him with remarkable looseness; he surely carried the same long, old-fashioned rifle, and if the horseman had been nearer he could not have seen any more gray threads in the flaxen hair and sparse, nany-colored beard. The mountaineer's sixty years sat as lightly upon him as though he were a dozen years younger.

The dog was Moses, and Moses continued to look into a tree-top and bark loudly, while his master gazed at him with manifest amusement.

"Thar, thar, Moses! that'll do!" Nevermiss suddenly announced, in the old, cheerful voice. "That bird ain't bigger nor my thumb, an' you'll skeer the egregious little creetur inter a fit, or inter the measles. Land o' Goshen! who'd think that you, who used ter tackle Injuns an' grizzly b'ars, would be makin' sech a mortal great fuss over a bird. Don't do so no more, dog!"

Moses obeyed at once, and Herkimer rode into view. Yank's eyes were as quick as ever, and so was his power of recognition. His face beamed with pleasure, and when the new-comer sprung from his horse, he was met with the firm, hearty clasp of the veteran's hand.

"Neighbor," quoth Nevermiss, "you take me unexpected, but you're welcome—you be, by burley! It's he'n many a moon sence I seen you last, but I b'ar in mind the tribulations we once had tergether, right wal. You was nigh me when we sit the Sioux on the cone, an' I reck'leck we thrashed 'em like the mischief."

"We did, indeed, and I remember that Yank Yellowbird was the greatest fighter there."

"I dunno 'bout that," replied the mountaineer, shaking his head gravely. "I come o' a valorous fam'ly, an' I've always tried ter keep the pedigree up, but I was mortally beset with voy'leent newrolgy, then—an epidemic I've pooty nigh got red on, now."

"This is easy to believe, for a more healthy-looking man I never saw. I suspect that you are as happy as you are well."

"Happy! Neighbor, the word don't begin ter express it. Jest beyond the big tree thar, a house stan's in the timber. Its owner is Sam'l Perkins, an' my da'ter, Mollie, is his wife. I live with 'em, an' I must say it's a sight better nor trampin' the wild mountains. Thar is one more in the fam'ly, too—thar is, by burley! Gilbert,"—here Yank leveled his index finger at his companion—"thar is a four-year-old boy thar, whose name is Samuel Yellowbird Perkins!"

Here the veteran threw back his head, and looked to be the happiest man in Dakota.

"Your grandson! I congratulate you, and make it all the more hearty because I, too, have a boy I am proud of. Zoe Rochester is my wife."

"Land o' Goshen! that so? I'm glad to hear it."

"Five years ago I told you I hoped to some time explain the mystery of the case. I am here to do it now."

"Zoe and her brother, Ames, had a rich

uncle named Warriner Vance. It looked as though Zoe was destined to be heiress to his property, and she went to take care of him when he was fatally ill. She was then my betrothed wife. Warriner Vance died, and there were whispers that he had been murdered by poison; and suspicion fell upon Zoe. She was never publicly accused, for evidence could not be had, but the private charges worked evil.

"Believing her innocent I stood by her, but her relatives and mine were both opposed to our marriage. They set out to prevent it; they lied to both of us; they placed each of us in a false light to the other; they succeeded in parting us; and I left the place.

"There bade fair to be a contest as to the legal heir, owing to a complication, but it was simplified when it was found, some months later, that Vance had made a will and left all his money to Zoe's cousin, Estella Vance. Nobody knew where Estella was, however—no one but Ames Rochester. He, however, knew that she was dead. He was a villain, and he formed the scheme of which you know a part.

"Zoe and Estella were exact counterparts, and Ames determined that the former should be transformed into Estella. She would not consent, but, aided by the infamous Frenchwoman, he started the scheme. Partially overcoming Zoe's resistance by threatening to publicly denounce her as Warriner Vance's murderer, he worked upon her fears until he gained his end. A subtle drug was given at Starvation City—the loneliest place they could find—and Zoe seemed to die in such a way as to afford proof. When she recovered she became Estella. At all times she was strongly opposed to the plot, but Ames and the Frenchwoman had her in their power.

"When they were dead Zoe and I had a talk, the result of which was that we went East, hired a good detective and had the case sifted. We gained proof that Vance took a drug to kill himself, and with her name cleared, Zoe became my wife. Vance's money we might have had, but we refused it. Thank Heaven! we are prosperous and happy without it!"

His story came to an end, and Yank grasped his hand.

"I'm mortal glad to hear this, neighbor. I always had a good opinion o' both you an' her, an' I'm glad ter hear you're happy."

At this moment the barking of a dog was again heard, and Moses, who had gone away, reappeared, frisking by the side of a boy of four years. The latter grasped the dog by the neck, and both fell to the ground together.

"That's him!" cried Yank, his face all aglow. "That's my grandson, Sam'l Perkins, Junior; an' did you ever see sech a boy! He's got a good 'eal o' Yellowbird about him, only his legs ain't so long. Thar reell'y was never another boy like him. He's got a one-year-old brother, an' the little scamp kicked his cradle all ter pieces yesterday. He took that from me, the younger boy did. Will you see Sam'l an' the dog play?"

"A fine pair, in good truth, Nevermiss!" "Wouldn't skeerly know Moses, would ye? He's got ter be an artom old, an' all his former gruffness is gone. Nothin' tickles him so much as ter romp with young Sam'l, an' sometimes"—here Yank pointed his forefinger at his visitor—"I lay down an' roll with 'em—I do, by hurley!"

"That shows how happy you are, and I am glad of it."

"It may not be tick-tacks o' war," added the veteran, apologetically, "but I'll bet ef my gran'father was hyar, he'd blow his Bunker Hill fife like the mischief. Seein' young Sam'l reminds me o' the time my gran'father formed me an' my brothers inter a reglar company o' militia. Abiathar was made cap'n; the lef-tanents was Hezekiah, Shubal, Philander an' Zaccheus; the sergeants was Issachar, Micah, Gamaliel, Bartholomew an' Peleg; the corporals was Eliphaz, Ithamar, Archelaus, Elijah, Absalom, Eliakim, Nehemiah an' Nicodemus; an' as the supply o' Yellowbird brothers was limited, this lefft only Lebbeus an' me ter be privates. Anyhow, thar was a heap o' disputin' 'bout the other officers, but Lebbeus an' I was elected 'thout oppersition."

"Neighbor, it'd done you a mortal sight o' good ter see my gran'father train us. He had us out ev'ry day, an' fu'st he'd drill us an' then give us a lecture on the Yellowbird pedigree; an' then he'd blow his Bunker Hill fife like the mischief. My cousin, the poetry-writer, she writ an egregious good song about us, an' we was poooty fur famed all 'round them parts."

The happy ex-mountaineer broke off suddenly.

"Say, Gilbert, do you see that boy, young Sam'l, roll Moses over! Thar never was sech a boy, an' I'm proud o' bein' his granddad. Thar's a mortal sight o' Yellowbird about him! Now, le's go an' see Pilot Sam'l an' Mollie. They'll be egregious glad ter see ye. Neighbor, I used ter fancy trampin' over the wild spots o' Nature, but it ain't no charm for me any more. Hyar I be fixed fur life, an' nobody ever had children like Mollie an' big Sam'l. The noblest an' the best, they be; and we all live in harmony an' happiness. Hark!"

Upon the air rung the tones of a hearty voice as a well-known song was sent out:

"It is the land for men of sand—
The wild, the free, the boundless West!"

"That's him!" cried Nevermiss; "that's my son-in-law, Sam'l Perkins! Ef thar's a better man I'd like ter see him—but thar ain't. Mollie says so, an' she knows!"

Yank had been urging Herkimer forward, and they now came in sight of a substantial house, at the door of which stood Sam and Mollie, who looked to be as happy as the ex-mountaineer; but Yank paused and faced his companion with the old twinkle in his gray eyes, and the old comical, whimsical expression of his mouth.

"By the way, Gilbert," he added, "I've found out that the Perkinses is an egregious old family, an' their pedigree can't be beat. In respect ter date, they stan' next ter *my* fam'ly, an' when my fu'st ancestor, Adam Yellowbird, had his oldest son fall an' hurt his knee, they sent fur Doctor Mahalalel Perkins. The doctor was a master-hand at sech things, an' he brought the boy out all right, barrin' a slight newrolgy, which has be'n some felt in later years."

"By you, for instance."

"An artom—an artom—but I'm mostly red on't. Now we'll go an' see Mollie an' Sam'l, an you kin tell the news. I'm glad it's good news, by hurley! but it's a fact that thar ain't nothin' but good news now. Thar comes Moses an' young Sam'l. Look at the boy! When he grows up, he'll be a credit ter the fam'ly pedigree—he will, by hurley! Now come on ag'in, an' look on the happiest home in the world!"

Here the record ends.

It ends with Mollie and Paradise Sam enjoying all that Providence could bestow; with Zoe and Herkimer freed from all troubles; with Doctor Fogg still gathering botanical specimens in some distant place; with peace on the border once the scene of Indian-fighting.

On one of the Reservations lives Trail-Lifter, the Modoc, with his wife and child; and the noble Indian who had been on so many wild trails finds a quiet life more to his taste than he would have believed possible in the past.

Yank Yellowbird still sees him now and then, but the veteran of the mountains and the prairies is wholly contented only when with Mollie and her family. There we leave him, with the prospect of many years of life still to come, and the chronicle of his adventures reaches a close.

THE END.

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